

Screen



The Hollywood romance

The French *policier*

The B movie

Amos Gitai

Subscription & order information

Screen is published four times a year at an annual subscription for institutions of UK and Europe £42, USA and Rest of the World US\$88 for individuals of UK and Europe £23, USA and Rest of the World US\$48, and for Students and Unemployed UK and Europe £18.50, USA and Rest of the World US\$38. Prices include postage by surface mail or for subscribers in the USA, Canada, Japan, India, Australia and New Zealand by Air Speeded Post.

Payment is required with all orders and subscriptions are accepted and entered by the volume(s). Payment may be made by the following methods: Cheque (made payable to Oxford University Press), National Girobank (Account 500 1056), Credit Card (Access, Visa, American Express, Diners Club), UNESCO Coupons, Bankers' Barclays Bank plc, PO Box 333, Oxford, Code 20-65-18, Account 00715654. Individual rates apply only when copies are sent to a private address and are paid for by personal cheque or credit card.

Please send orders and requests for sample copies to: Journals Subscriptions Department, Oxford University Press, Pinkhill House, Southfield Road, Eynsham, Oxford OX8 1JJ. Telex 837330 OXPRESG.

© 1992 The John Logie Baird Centre. No article may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system without the permission in writing of the editors and the publisher. **Screen** incorporates **Screen Education**.

ISSN 0036-9543

Cover illustration

Playtime (Courtesy of Pierre Tati and BFI stills archive)

editors

John Caughie
Simon Frith (Reports editor)
Sandra Kemp
Norman King
Annette Kuhn (Reviews editor)

issue editor

Sandra Kemp

editorial assistant

Sarelle Reid

editorial advisory board

William Boddy (USA)
Annette Brauerhoch (Germany)
Beverley Brown (UK)
Guliana Bruno (Italy/USA)
Charlotte Brunsdon (UK)
Alison Butler (UK)
Barbara Creed (Australia)
Sean Cubitt (UK)
Alan Durant (UK)
John Fletcher (UK)
Claudia Gorbman (USA)
Pat Mellencamp (USA)
Mandy Merck (UK)
Steve Neale (UK)
Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (UK)
Julian Petley (UK)
Jackie Stacey (UK)
Will Straw (Canada)
Gillian Swanson (Australia)
Ginette Vincendeau (UK)

editorial address

The Editors, **Screen**
The John Logie Baird Centre
University of Glasgow
Glasgow G12 8QQ

33:1 Spring 1992

LEA JACOBS. The B film and the problem of cultural distinction 1

PAUL WILLEMEN *Bangkok–Bahrain to Berlin–Jerusalem*. Amos Gitai's editing 14

ROBERT LAPSLEY and MICHAEL WESTLAKE. From *Casablanca* to *Pretty Woman* the politics of romance 27

GINETTE VINCENTEAU France 1945–65 and Hollywood: the *policier* as inter-national text 50

reports and debates

ANNETTE HAMILTON: The mediascape of modern Southeast Asia 81

MORAG SHIACH Screen Studies Conference 93

JOHN CORNER: Presumption as theory 'realism' in television studies 97

reviews

NORMAN KING: Noel Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (eds), *Early Cinema Space, Frame, Narrative*, BFI videos *Early Cinema. Primitives and Pioneers* 103

ALISON BUTLER Vèvè A Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren. Volume 1, Part One, Signatures (1917–1942)* and *The Legend of Maya Deren. Volume 1, Part Two, Chambers (1942–1947)* 110

SANDRA KEMP Yvonne Rainer, *The Films of Yvonne Rainer* 117

PATRICIA HOLLAND: Mary Ellen Brown (ed), *Television and Women's Culture*; Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera* 122

Obituary

Masha Enzensberger

Masha Enzensberger, who died last autumn, was a valued collaborator on *Screen* ever since the journal began its exploration of alternative modes of film theory and practice in the early 1970s

She was born in Moscow on 27 June 1943, the daughter of the poet Margarita Aliger and the novelist and president of the Writers' Union, Alexander Fadeyev

She was twice married. Her first marriage, in the early 1960s, was to the Russian translator of Dante. Then in 1967 she married the German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and left the Soviet Union, travelling with Hans Magnus first to Germany, then to the United States and Cuba. They separated in 1969 shortly after returning to Europe, and Masha settled in London, where her culture and expansive personality soon found her many admirers.

Masha's collaboration with *Screen* began in 1972, when the magazine, under Sam Rohdie's editorship, was engaged in the rediscovery of the Russian and early Soviet avant garde and the revolutionary culture of the 1920s. Masha's contributions to *Screen* were distinguished not only by the depth of her cultural knowledge but by her human sympathies. At a time when the search was on for exemplary models of political and theoretical practice, her sense of the terrible ironies of her country's history restrained her from fashionable excesses of hasty and sectarian judgement. Her assessment of Dziga Vertov in *Screen*, vol. 13, no. 4, and even more her lengthy portrait of Osip Brik in *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 3, are infused with a deeply historical fellow-feeling for their subjects—rising stars of the optimistic 1920s, forced into various compromises and expedients in the Stalin years

As time went on the condition of *émigrée* became increasingly hard for her. After twenty years she still felt an alien in England, while growing more and more distant from her homeland. She tried to escape the confines of her Russian specialization by taking an M.A. in film studies at the Polytechnic of Central London, but she always found herself drawn back into the world of Russian studies, which was both a home and a prison to her. She found solace in translating poetry—first Mayakovsky, then Mandelstam. Her versions of Mayakovsky (published under the title *Listen!* by the Redstone Press in 1987) reveal him as a far different and better poet than the futurist ranter familiar from earlier translations. Her translations of Mandelstam will be published by the Menard Press in 1992.

Early in 1991 she was struck by a severe depressive crisis. Having recovered somewhat over the early summer, she flew to Moscow in July. She returned to London in September. Her comment on the defeat of the *coup d'état* in Moscow, which she witnessed, was characteristic. 'A handful of brave good people have saved our country.' On 6 October she was found dead from an overdose of antidepressants.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith
26 November 1991

The B film and the problem of cultural distinction

LEA JACOBS

- 1 Fred Eastman, 'How to select movies for children' *Parent's Magazine*, March 1934 pp 18, 67-8
- 2 See letters by Marie Duff and Benjamin S. Lichtenstein *New York Times* 12 June 1938, section X p 4
- 3 Against double features' *New York Times*, 8 March 1939, p 19
Throughout the thirties parent/teacher groups protested about double bills and attempted to organize ways of controlling children's attendance at double features. In 1938, *Variety* reported on a bill proposed in the Nebraska legislature limiting theatre programmes to 150 minutes as a sock against the duals', *Variety* 14 December 1938, p 11. As early as 1934 *Parent's Magazine* proposed a model movie ordinance aimed at ensuring that local theatres provided at least one programme each week in which every feature would have met the approval of a community motion-picture commission (to my knowledge this ordinance was never passed). See George J. Hecht 'A model movie law' *Parent's Magazine* November 1933 pp 23, 77-8. George J. Hecht, 'How to get better movies for your children' *Parent's Magazine* September 1934 pp 15 54-61. Also see the article 'Mothers aid sought in drive to elevate movie standards' *New York Times* 26 February 1939 section II p 4

In 1934, Fred Eastman, writing in *Parent's Magazine* about how to select films for children, cautioned: 'The fine effects of a picture that meets these tests [of suitability for children] may be offset if the picture is presented on a program along with cheap and trashy pictures.'¹ Letters to the editor of the Sunday edition of the *New York Times* amusement section raised similar objections to the pairing of children's movies with inappropriate second features, one father complaining about a 1938 double bill of Deanna Durbin's *Mad About Music* and *Penitentiary*.² In 1939, Dr Ray Lyman Wilbur, of the Motion Picture Research Council, went on record against the double feature saying that 'diversified programs made it unlikely that both features of a double bill would be of "family" suitability'.³

The evaluation of the B film by parent/teacher groups as 'cheap and trashy', 'lurd', without serious intellectual or moral content, is precisely the sort of judgement which film critics like Manny Farber, and later, Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn had to argue against in asserting the importance and interest of the Bs. My aim here is to discuss how the 'low' cultural status of the B movie was institutionalized within the film industry itself in the thirties. I am not concerned with how particular critics or reformers judged the Bs, but rather the construction of the *distinction* between A and B features, between 'quality' films and what was sometimes called 'the lower half' of the double bill.

The practice of exhibiting two features on a programme seems to have begun in the late twenties, although at this date the double bill

4 Paul Seale 'A host of others toward a nonlinear history of poverty row and the coming of sound' *Wide Angle*, vol 13 no 1 (1991) pp 74–5

5 'What to do about duals?' *Variety*, 12 October 1938 p 1
Duals here to stay for long time' *Variety* 5 April 1939 p 1

6 Seale 'A host of others'

7 Clive Hirschhorn *The Universal Story* (New York: Crown Publishers 1983), p 13

8 On the cost of *The Informer* see Richard Jewell and Vernon Harbin, *The RKO Story* (New York: Crown Books 1982) p 84. Jewell discussed the relative costs of As Bs and 'intermediates' in 'B film production at RKO Radio Pictures' a paper presented at the December 1990 conference of the Mostra internazionale del nuovo cinema in Siena. In the thirties, RKO budgeted westerns at \$30,000–\$90,000, other Bs were budgeted at \$100,000–\$150,000, 'intermediates' or A/Bs at \$250,000–\$500,000 and an A film with major stars cost from \$350,000–\$1,500,000. By this scale, *The Informer* was budgeted as an intermediate rather than a B. The opening of *The Informer* at the Radio City Music Hall in New York is noted in the 'Picture Grosses' pages in *Variety* 15 May 1935

9 *Variety* 28 December 1938 p 13

10 A review of the major first-run theatres listed in the 'Picture Grosses' pages in *Variety* shows that *Pacific Liner* played the top of the bill for the weeks 11 Jan 1939 through to 8 Feb 1939. After this date it plays the bottom half of the bill. As I show below this is not the typical distribution pattern for B films at RKO

was largely confined to theatres in the Northeast and Southwest.⁴ It became widespread among independent exhibitors in the early thirties and by the middle of the decade even the first-run theatres affiliated with the major studios were forced by the pressure of competition to offer their patrons double bills (although some first-run theatres continued to programme single features augmented by shorts, newsreels and live vaudeville).⁵ As Paul Seale has shown, the development of the double feature gave new impetus to the so-called Poverty Row studios, and more generally to low-budget filmmaking.⁶ But the studios had always produced films in various budget ranges, and hence price ranges. For example, in the teens, Universal's feature output was divided into several series: the low-budget 'Red Feather' productions, the more costly 'Bluebird' releases, and the occasional prestige or 'Jewel' production.⁷ The growth in the thirties of what *Variety* called the 'duals', however, necessitated the elaboration of new mechanisms for distinguishing between films based upon their cost.

We tend to assume that a film's position within the double bill was determined in the planning and financing of production. By this definition, a B film is one made quickly on a low budget, without major stars or expensive literary properties, in a specialized production unit – such as Lee Marcus's unit at RKO – or by a B studio like Monogram or Republic. While I certainly do not want to discount the importance of the production context for defining the B film, I would argue that its status was determined much more complexly within the system of distribution and exhibition. The pattern of a film's release, the kinds of publicity and critical attention devoted to it, even the sorts of theatres it played in, all worked to articulate and maintain the distinction between A and B pictures. Of course, these factors were not independent of film budget, but neither were they reducible to it. Relatively low-budget films were sometimes given the kind of release and publicity typical of an A. John Ford's *The Informer* (1935), for example, was produced on a budget of \$243,000. While this cost more than a run-of-the-mill B, it was inexpensively produced compared to most A films which, according to Richard Jewell, ranged from \$350,000–\$1.5 million at RKO. Nonetheless, the film opened at the prestigious Radio City Music Hall in New York, and was widely regarded as a production of high quality, garnering Academy Awards for Ford, Dudley Nichols, Victor McLaglen and Max Steiner.⁸ Even run-of-the-mill B films sometimes played as A during part of their initial run. *Pacific Liner* (1939), a B film produced by Robert Sisk at RKO, was described by *Variety* as 'filler in the duals'.⁹ Yet it screened singly or on the top half of the double bill for six weeks after its release in January 1939.¹⁰ And films moved down as well as up the spectrum – some of those financed as A productions were relegated to the lower half of the bill on their initial or subsequent run. Take

11 Jewell *The RKO Story* p 123

the example of *Room Service* (1938). RKO spent \$255,000 for the rights, the most expensive property ever purchased by the studio.¹¹ For three months the Marx Brothers' film either played singly with vaudeville, or on the top half of the double bills listed in the 'Picture Grosses' pages in *Variety*. After 12 December 1938, however, it was relegated to the lower half of the bill due to its poor performance at the box office. The point is that in the sphere of exhibition, the distinction between A and B was a fluid one; a function of marketing and distribution strategies which varied as distributors and exhibitors responded to box-office returns and a film's reviews during its opening run.

The redefinition of a film's status was made possible through the system of block-booking and blind-selling. Exhibitors did not contract for specific titles but rather for a block of films identified only by number and price bracket.¹² Contracts usually specified multiple price brackets, in some of which the distributor received a percentage of the gross (the A or 'quality' films), in others a flat rental (the Bs). In the Amended and Supplemental Complaint in the Paramount case, the government gives the following as a typical example of price bracketing: 'Four features at 35%, six at 30%; ten at 25%; ten at \$200.00 flat rental, and ten at \$100.00 flat rental'.¹³ Because the contract did not stipulate titles, distributors and exhibitors could negotiate over where any particular film fitted within the overall price system. In the Paramount case, the government notes, 'most features are not definitely allocated to a price bracket until after their release, and the question of proper allocation is a continuous source of dispute between exhibitors and distributors'.¹⁴ Thus, the major producer-distributors, in negotiation with their own affiliated theatres, as well as the large, independent theatre chains, made decisions concerning the length of time any given film would be in first-run release and on what terms. Based upon trade showings of completed films, and upon reports of a film's initial box-office performance in key cities like New York and Los Angeles, the most powerful exhibitors were in a position to turn down films which they thought likely to be unprofitable¹⁵ or to extend the run of highly profitable ones. Films which were unattractive to the major first-run houses were either moved directly to less desirable subsequent-run theatres or screened on the second half of the double bill in the major cities. While relatively unprofitable A films could be relegated to the ranks of the Bs, there was also an incentive for the studios to sell attractive B films to exhibitors as As if they could. This was especially the case for so-called 'intermediates', which cost between \$250,000 and \$500,000.¹⁶ The cost of the 'intermediates' precluded the studio making a profit unless some exhibitors could be persuaded (or coerced!) to pay a percentage of the gross rather than the flat rental fee usual for westerns and other B pictures.

12 Mae Dena Huetig *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry: A Study in Industrial Organization* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1944, rpt Jerome Ozer 1971), pp 120-4

13 Amended and Supplemental Complaint, United States of America v Paramount et al published in *Film History* vol 4 no 1 (1990) p 39 note 12

14 Ibid p 20

15 Ibid p 25

16 Jewell 'B film production at RKO Radio Pictures. I am indebted to Richard Jewell for this analysis of the problem of making a profit on so-called intermediates

Seeking to understand how the A/B distinction was structured at the level of distribution and exhibition, I have examined the entirety of RKO's output for the six-month period between October 1938 and April 1939. There is no particular logic to the choice of dates, aside from the fact that double bills became increasingly widespread over the decade (there are very few double bills in the major first-run theatres listed in *Variety* prior to 1935). Using the 'Picture Grosses' pages in *Variety* I have been able to determine where films played on double bills in both affiliated and independent theatres in major US cities. I have also looked at the kinds of reviews and publicity the films received when they opened in New York. These data indicate that the release pattern typical of RKO's A features differed considerably from the B features, but nonetheless that it was possible for a film's status within the system to be redefined after its initial release.

As Mae Huettig noted in her study of vertical integration in the motion-picture industry, one of the most important functions of the ownership of first-run theatres by the majors was that it permitted them to give their films a 'build-up' on their initial run.¹⁷ A barrage of publicity and advertising, accompanied by film reviews and related stories in big-city newspapers, helped to build audience interest at the time of a film's opening. More importantly, what amounted to a national advertising campaign helped to secure successful subsequent runs in small cities and towns throughout the country. Yet the treatment of A and B features was very different in this regard. While the release of A features was calculated to maximize publicity build-up, the release of B features was often unheralded and even haphazard.

RKO's *Gunga Din*, which opened in late January of 1939, and *Love Affair*, which opened in late March, will serve as examples of the release pattern typical of an A picture. *Gunga Din* was a 'special', that is, it played singly even in theatres long accustomed to double bills. Some theatres, such as the Pantages in Los Angeles, even charged a special admission price of \$2.00 at the premiere. *Love Affair* is a more 'ordinary' A, in that it generally played with a second feature or a vaudeville programme even on its opening run. Both films were released almost simultaneously in a large number of metropolitan centres. *Gunga Din* opened in Los Angeles and New York in the week ending 1 February 1939, and then within the next two weeks opened in fifteen other cities: Washington, San Francisco, Boston, Denver, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Chicago, Minneapolis, Portland, Louisville, Detroit, Indianapolis, Providence, Kansas City and Buffalo. The release pattern of *Love Affair* is similar, with the film opening in nineteen cities within three weeks (the cities are New York, Philadelphia, Denver, Omaha, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Indianapolis, Louisville, Chicago, Seattle, Boston, Denver, Buffalo, Portland, Washington, Cleveland

17 Huettig, *Economic Control of the Motion Picture Industry* pp. 80-1

18 *Variety* 25 January 1939 p 11 and 'Picture Grosses' pages

19 Janet Staiger 'Announcing wares: winning patrons, voicing ideals: thinking about the history and theory of film advertising' *Cinema Journal* vol 29 no 3 (1990) pp 12-17

20 The following appeared in the *New York Times*: a piece in advance of the premiere 13 January 1939, p 25, a review 27 January 1939 p 17 B R Crisler's 'Poets and the cinema' 29 January 1939 section IX, p 5 and an interview with Sam Jaffe who played Gunga Din 5 February 1939, section X, p 4

21 *New York Times* 17 March 1939, p 25

22 In order to gauge the extent to which films were discussed in the contemporary press I have utilized Patricia King Hanson and Stephen L. Hanson *Film Review Index Volume 1 1882-1949* (Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press 1986)

and Kansas City). There are several indications that this kind of release pattern was timed to coincide with a national advertising campaign. The review of *Gunga Din* in *Variety* notes that the film 'has numerous exploitation angles and is backed by a giant bally and advertising campaign' and exhibitors in Washington (at the Keith's theatre) and Indianapolis (at the Indiana theatre) report a splurge of advertising prior to the film's release in those cities.¹⁸ Janet Staiger's work on the history of advertising suggests that this kind of coordinated national advertising campaign, which effectively bypassed the local exhibitor, had become an industry norm by the early thirties.¹⁹

Quite apart from the publicity orchestrated by the studio, the openings of both *Gunga Din* and *Love Affair* were accompanied by a great deal of press coverage. *The New York Times* published four pieces related to *Gunga Din* within the space of three weeks, including a piece in the Sunday edition entitled 'Poets and the cinema' in which B. R. Crisler discussed the film in relation to Kipling's original.²⁰ The film and theatre magazines which reviewed *Gunga Din* include: *National Board of Review Magazine*, *Photoplay*, *Rob Wagner's Script*, *Sight & Sound*, *Stage* and *Tatler*. A large number of general interest magazines also carried material on the film including *Commonweal*, *Country Life*, *Nation*, *New Masses*, *New Republic*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, *Scholastic*, *Time* and *World Horizons*. The *New York Times* coverage of *Love Affair* was not as extensive as *Gunga Din*, consisting of only one review.²¹ But the coverage of *Love Affair* was wide-ranging, including both film magazines – *National Board of Review Magazine*, *Photoplay*, *Sight & Sound*, *Stage* – and general interest magazines – *Canadian Magazine*, *Life*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *New Yorker*, *Newsweek* and *Time*.²² Because these pieces appeared either in the week immediately preceding the opening of these films or in the following month, this kind of press coverage effectively buttressed the pattern of the film's release and the national advertising campaigns orchestrated by the studio.

Made without stars or prestigious literary properties, B features were not expected to draw audiences to theatres in the way that A features did. Moreover, since distributors received only a flat rental fee (as opposed to a percentage of the gross) for B films, it is not surprising that the studios did not devote many resources to advertising the Bs. An article in *Variety* notes the difference in the treatment of A and B features:

Millions of box office dollars are lost in the course of a year by an industry that is too much concerned with the pushovers made to order for theatres, and too little enthused over many good films which require advertising push and bustle to get their values before the public. . . . Of course, the reason why many good films

are passed up is because the major producers themselves concentrate on their biggest and best, and many a deserving but small-budget film is shot out to the exchanges without so much as a letter of introduction to its (the studio's) own salesmen and branch managers.²³

In general, the release pattern of RKO's B features confirms the suggestion in *Variety* that the distribution of the Bs was not accompanied by a national advertising campaign. Whereas the openings of A features in major cities were concentrated within several weeks, timed to coincide with publicity and promotion efforts and film reviews, the openings of B features in major cities were spread out over several months, with films seemingly slotted into first-run theatres as they were needed to fill out double bills. The releases of two B pictures, *Next Time I Marry*, a comedy starring Lucille Ball and James Ellison, and *Fisherman's Wharf*, one of a series of Bobby Breen musicals produced by Sol Lesser and distributed by RKO, are indicative of this release pattern.

Fisherman's Wharf did have a gala opening at RKO's main San Francisco theatre, the Golden Gate. The film screened singly in tandem with public appearances by child star Bobby Breen and co-stars Henry Armetta and Leo Carillo. This opening was apparently motivated by the film's setting – the exhibitor noted 'Natives are suckers for pictures with a San Francisco locale'. Despite this successful premiere, however, *Fisherman's Wharf* appeared in only five cities within the first three weeks of its opening run: San Francisco, Minneapolis, Buffalo, Omaha and Brooklyn. It reached New York only on the fourth week of its run, Chicago on the fifth and Los Angeles on the sixth. *Next Time I Marry* had a similarly restricted opening in seven cities in three weeks: New York, Providence, Baltimore, Boston, Omaha, Los Angeles and Kansas City.

The fact that B films did not receive a nationally organized advertising campaign meant that it was not necessary for the studios to coordinate a pattern of near simultaneous releases across the United States. Indeed, I suspect that one of the advantages of the Bs for distributors and exhibitors was that they could be booked in and out of theatres in a relatively flexible manner. They could be used to vary a programme from week to week when a popular A film was 'held over', or a programme of two Bs could be booked into a theatre in order to fill a few empty days in the middle of the week. For example, in March of 1939 *Gunga Din* played for two weeks in the Adams theatre in Detroit, the first week accompanied by *Next Time I Marry* and the second week by *Peck's Bad Boy at the Circus* (RKO). A similar pattern occurred at the Paramount theatre in Portland during the weeks of 15 and 22 February and the Paramount in Seattle during the weeks of 22 February and 1

²⁴ These are the dates that the programme changes are described in *Variety*. For similar weekly changes in the case of *Love Affair* see the Pantages theatre in Los Angeles *Variety* 22 March 1939, and the Keith Memorial in Boston *Variety*, 29 March 1939.

²⁵ *Variety* 29 March 1939, Picture Grosses pages.

²⁶ *New York Times* 2 December 1938 p. 27.

March.²⁴ In the same period, RKO's reissue of the relatively low-budget *Lost Patrol* (originally released in 1934) with *Star of Midnight* (originally released in 1935) was often used to fill in gaps in a theatre's programme. For example, the Fulton theatre in Pittsburgh showed a double bill of *Star of Midnight* and *Lost Patrol* for four days, following the end of the run of a major A release – Shirley Temple in *The Little Princess* (20th-Century Fox).²⁵

The lack of a coherent advertising and publicity campaign for B films was seconded by the paucity of national press coverage for such releases. In striking contrast with *Gunga Din* and *Love Affair*, neither *Fisherman's Wharf* nor *Next Time I Marry* were reviewed in any general interest magazines. The only film journals to discuss these films were industry trade journals such as *Variety* and *The Motion Picture Herald* which reviewed all the films in release, and hence covered the Bs. The *New York Times*, among other daily newspapers, tended to review Bs in an attempt to discuss most of what was exhibited in the city. However, much less column space was devoted to second features in a newspaper like the *Times*. For example, Brosley Crowther reviewed *Next Time I Marry* in a short 2½ inch single column space.²⁶ In the same issue of the *Times*, Frank Nugent's review of *Sacrifice d'Honneur* by Marcel L'Herbier spread over several columns at the top of the page and was given a headline in bold face. Moreover, some B pictures were never reviewed in the *Times* at all; Nugent and Crowther seem to have drawn the line at dog pictures like RKO's *Almost a Gentleman*.

Thus B films tended to open in many fewer theatres than A films did in the initial weeks of their run, and they came to exhibitors without the benefit of national advertising or extended press coverage. Moreover, precisely because they were not calculated to draw a large audience, they tended to appear in smaller and less prestigious venues than did A films. In New York, for example, RKO's A features premiered with a stage show at the Radio City Music Hall, a picture palace which seated 5,980 with admission prices ranging from 40 cents to \$1.65. Both *Gunga Din* and *Love Affair* opened there. In contrast, B films played in one of a number of smaller venues: the Rivoli, seating 2,092 and charging 25–85 cents admission, the Palace, seating 1,700 and charging from 25–55 cents, and the Rialto, seating 750 and charging 25–55 cents. *Fisherman's Wharf* opened at the Palace, on the second half of a double bill with Warners' *Wings of the Navy*, an A film on its second run. This kind of New York opening is quite typical of RKO's B films in this period. *Next Time I Marry* also opened on the second half of a double bill, playing at the Rivoli with RKO's *The Mad Miss Manton*, an A film in second run. Even lower on the scale, action films, westerns and horror films do not seem to have played at the Rivoli or the Palace very often. These films seem to have been restricted to the small Rialto theatre. *Boy Slaves*, an RKO

exploitation picture opened singly at the Rialto, as did the western *Renegade Ranger*. In the mid-forties, the films of Val Lewton's unit also premiered at this theatre.

Outside New York city, many of RKO's B films opened in small theatres which, like the Rialto, specialized almost entirely in B films and reissues of older A features. Unlike the Rialto, however, such theatres often showed two double or triple bills a week. Thus, *Next Time I Marry* opened in Minneapolis in the fifth week of its run in the Aster, a 900 seat theatre charging from 15–25 cents. During the first half of the week the Aster showed a double bill of *Tough Guys* (Universal) and *Comet Over Broadway* (Warners) and the second half of the week *Spy Ring* (Columbia) and *Next Time I Marry*. Similarly, the RKO film played in Omaha in the Avenue Dundee Military which encompassed three theatres seating 950, 810 and 650, and charged 10–25 cents admission. The programme at these theatres consisted of a double bill of *Dawn Patrol* (Warners) and *The Cowboy and the Lady* (United Artists) for the first half of the week and followed by a triple bill of *Gangster's Boy* (Monogram), *Service De Luxe* (Universal) and *Next Time I Marry*.

The system of distribution and exhibition thus functioned to promote A films much more actively than Bs through the placement of A films in larger and more expensive theatres, and the scheduling of releases to allow for a build-up of publicity and coverage in national magazines such as *Life*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. Not only did A films tend to make more money as a consequence of this system of distribution and exhibition, but also they were accorded marks of cultural distinction – playing in the most elegant downtown theatres, reviewed and discussed in literary magazines like *New Republic* and *Nation* as well as film magazines like *Sight & Sound* and *National Board of Review Magazine*. In this sense, the trade practices of the film industry recapitulated the same cultural hierarchy which informed the complaints of parent/teacher groups about what Fred Eastman called 'cheap and trashy' second features. The patterns of film distribution and exhibition functioned according to the assumption that B films did not merit and could not support the kind of attention which the studios routinely tried to drum up for the As.

The distinction between A and B features was thus well institutionalized within the system of distribution where it signalled both a strategic judgement about the kind of profit that could be expected from a film (an A film was worth advertising because of the greater proceeds that could be derived from it) and, perhaps more amorphously, an aesthetic judgement that the film was of a certain 'quality' (at the very least, the back projection in an A film would not embarrass the studio in front of the reviewers from *Sight & Sound* and the *New York Times*). But if the distinction between A and B films was relatively well fixed within the system of

distribution, the status of any individual film within this system was open to negotiation. As I have already noted, it was possible for low-budget films to garner an A release. Such 'crossovers' are of particular interest because they reveal how both economic and aesthetic considerations were brought to bear upon the marketing and distribution of features.

The example of *A Man to Remember*, released in late November of 1938, points to the importance of notions of 'quality' and aesthetic standards in determining a feature's status. The film was planned and financed on a low budget and had no major stars. The story of a small-town doctor and his family, the doctor was played by Edward Ellis and top billing was given to the child star Anne Shirley, who played the doctor's daughter. It was the first film directed by the then unknown Garson Kanin, scripted by Dalton Trumbo. I would like to know more about how the decision-making hierarchy at the studio functioned in this instance, but apparently sometime in late October or early November it was decided that the film was 'good' enough to distribute as an A. The *Motion Picture Herald* noted that the preview of the film at the studio brought tears to the eyes of supposedly hardened 'newspaper folk'.²⁷ There were two reviews of the film in *Variety* (itself an unusual occurrence). The first appeared in October, when the film opened in Kansas City, and characterized it as a B, albeit an extraordinary one. 'Without any b o power to carry it along [i.e. stars], the picture is nevertheless a strong programmer that will go particularly well in spots where audiences appreciate a study of human nature with all the dramatic strength involved in such unfoldment.'²⁸ The review thus already called attention to the film's subject matter as a possible selling point with a serious and putatively discriminating audience – 'spots where audiences appreciate a study of human nature'. The second review appeared in November and by this time *Variety* was suggesting that the film could be sold by the local exhibitor as an A:

A Man to Remember won't be recalled by exhibs unless it is studiously and extensively exploited. With hardly a name in the cast that will mean an extra nickel in the till and a tepid title, the picture should mean nice business if accorded showmanly treatment. This is the sort of entertainment the average American likes but it will take painstaking bally to let customers know it. This is one that the exhibitor can personally endorse in his advertisements because the picture will back up such boosting with word-of-mouth boosting. . . . This production tags Garson Kanin, newcomer from New York legit, where he was an actor and production assistant to George Abbott, as an outstanding Hollywood directorial find of the year. His crisp approach to the country doctor saga and the novel handling of nearly every situation lifts an ordinary programmer into a money feature.²⁹

²⁷ *Motion Picture Herald*, vol. 133, no. 1 (1938), p. 39.

²⁸ *Variety*, 5 October 1938, p. 14.

²⁹ *Variety*, 9 November 1938, p. 16.

The release pattern of *A Man to Remember* seems to mirror *Variety*'s difficulty in characterizing the film, wavering between B and A status. In the first four weeks of its run, it screened in only eight cities (Kansas City, Omaha, Providence, Denver, New York, Philadelphia and Buffalo), playing the top half of the double bill in four. It opened on the second half of a double bill in Kansas City on 19 October 1938. By the next week it had top billing but opposite other RKO Bs in relatively small theatres (in one case with *Mr Doodle Kicks Off* at the Albee in Providence and in the other with *Affairs of Annabel* at the Brandeis in Omaha). When it finally opened in New York on 9 November 1938, it played at the Rivoli, a theatre of moderate size which premiered many RKO B features before it closed its doors later that same year. Yet the film clearly got excellent reviews. An exhibitor at the Aldine theatre in Philadelphia noted 'Came in almost unheralded, but is getting plenty of belated pushing now as result of rave notices.' Frank Nugent gave it an enthusiastic review in the *Times*: 'It has a modest cast. Its sets are as commonplace as the small town which is its scene. In brief, it is probably one of the most uncolossal pictures of the year. But there is no real connection – although Hollywood often says so – between a big budget and a big picture.'³⁰ The film was also picked up in a number of national magazines, although some reviews must have come too late to do it much good: *New Masses* (22 November 1938); *New Yorker* (12 November 1938); *Rob Wagner's Script* (24 December 1938); *Time* (24 October 1938), *New Statesman and Nation* (1 April 1939); *Newsweek* (17 April 1939).

The accumulation of good reviews seems to have helped to maintain the film's distribution as an A, despite some complaints in the 'Picture Grosses' pages of *Variety* of poor performance at the box office. By 14 December 1938, that is six weeks after its opening in New York, *A Man to Remember* had showed on the top half of the double bill in four out of the seven theatres in which it played (an A in Cincinnati, Washington, Chicago, Portland, a B in Los Angeles, Seattle and Indianapolis). It played singly for a run of nine weeks in Minneapolis, where the exhibitor at the World theatre offered the following advice: 'Critics have fallen all over selves in boosting this one and customers also are singing its praises. House tripled usual newspaper display advertising appropriation and went all the way in selling it.' In the long run, the distribution strategy for this film seems to have been quite advantageous for RKO, earning profits of \$145,000, a performance characterized as an 'outstanding success' in one business history of the studio.³¹ I should note, however, that the exhibitors in the 'Picture Grosses' pages of *Variety* complained repeatedly that their returns were below par for *A Man to Remember*. I surmise that the film made most of its money in subsequent-run theatres or in smaller cities and towns.

Clearly then, the studio was able to capitalize on the supposedly

³⁰ *New York Times* 7 November 1938 p. 23

³¹ Richard Jewell, *A history of RKO Radio Pictures, Incorporated 1928–1942* (Diss. University of Southern California 1978) pp. 445–6

32 Richard Jewell was kind enough to share these figures with me, they are based upon his work with the RKO legal files, as well as distribution files which are unfortunately no longer available for research

'worthy' subject matter and ensuing critical acclaim accorded to *A Man to Remember* in planning its distribution. The studio did not hold to this strategy in all instances, however, and the case of *The Great Man Votes*, John Barrymore's last film, provides an interesting contrast. In many ways the Barrymore film resembled *A Man to Remember*. Directed by Garson Kanin, it was initially budgeted as an intermediate (it cost \$265,000, which put it in a higher budget bracket than *A Man to Remember* which cost \$118,000).³² The studio evidently decided to release it as an A following the success of Kanin's previous feature. It opened in late January 1939, showing at the Radio City Music Hall in New York and twelve other cities within the first three weeks of its run (Denver, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, Kansas City, Indianapolis, Washington, Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Providence and Omaha). Although the review in the *New York Times* was lukewarm, it seems to have been widely discussed in the daily press. Exhibitors in New York, Baltimore, Kansas City, Pittsburgh and Cleveland referred to 'good notices' or 'good exploitation and word of mouth'. Nonetheless, the film did not do well at the box office. The Music Hall reported a 'sorrowful 55,000' on one week. The Orpheum in Kansas City noted 'biz average at 5,000'. The Stanley in Pittsburgh complained 'flicker well received but getting no b o. attention'. The Palace in Cleveland made a similar observation 'Earning excellent notices but trade is off'. The Gopher in Minneapolis pulled the film early, noting 'picture out after 800 on four days.' By the week of 15 March 1939, that is six weeks after its opening in New York, *The Great Man Votes* only appeared in the B feature slot in the theatres listed in *Variety*. In Indianapolis and Seattle it screened as the second half of a double bill with *Love Affair*, which did well in both theatres. In Oklahoma City, the Barrymore film took second billing to a western, RKO's *Arizona Legion*. By late March and early April the film appeared in the smaller theatres offering split double and triple bills. In Omaha, the Avenue Dundee Military showed a double bill of *Kentucky* (20th-Century) and *Zaza* (Paramount) split with an unforgettable triple bill of *The Great Man Votes*, *Up River* (20th-Century Fox) and *Down on the Farm* (20th-Century Fox). In comparison with *A Man to Remember*, then, *The Great Man Votes* played in many more theatres during the opening weeks of its run, and had the benefit of a premiere at the Radio City Music Hall. Yet it was demoted to B status much more quickly – after only six weeks – and in a much more definitive manner. Six weeks after it opened *A Man to Remember* was still being billed as an A in over half the theatres it played in, despite the complaints from exhibitors about its low box-office draw.

I can only account for the difference in the handling of *A Man to Remember* and *The Great Man Votes* in terms of the other RKO features they had to compete with. *A Man to Remember* was

³³ In ascertaining release dates, I have looked at the date of the first review of a film in *Variety* and its mention in the Picture Grosses pages. Richard Jewell informs me that *Room Service* was the 'major disaster of the year' recorded as a \$330,000 loss by the studio while *The Mad Miss Manton* was an indifferent performer which earned a profit of \$85,000.

released in early October, and thus competed with two A films that did not make very much money – *Room Service* released in mid-September and *The Mad Miss Manton* released in mid-October.³³ In these circumstances the studio was clearly well advised to sell Kanin's first film as an A if it could, since it did not have much other product for the A slot in its own theatres at its disposal. The season of the release also worked in favour of the film – a sentimental 'family' picture, *A Man to Remember* was widely screened during the Christmas season (especially the weeks of 7 and 14 December). In contrast, *The Great Man Votes* opened in late January, only one week before the opening of *Gunga Din*. A very good box-office draw, *Gunga Din* was held over from two to three weeks in most of the major first-run theatres in which it played. It thus served to drive other RKO features from the A slot in RKO theatres. And just as *Gunga Din* was finishing its first run, *Love Affair* opened in mid-March, another success which was held over an average of two weeks. In these circumstances, it was clearly in the studio's interest quickly to demote *The Great Man Votes* to the lower half of the double bill, despite the presence of Barrymore, a prestigious if waning star, and generally good reviews.

The effect of RKO's distribution strategies on the definition of the B picture gives us some insight into how the classical Hollywood cinema, as opposed to other institutions, worked to perpetuate cultural hierarchies. Within the fields of literature and cultural studies, the debate over canons has given rise to great interest in the ways aesthetic hierarchies are elaborated and maintained. Writing in 1979, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has studied the way in which the education system produces differences in taste as a function of class.³⁴ More recently, there have been studies of how the distinction between 'high' and 'low' culture has been constructed within institutions such as the symphony orchestra, the legitimate theatre and the art marketplace.³⁵ The distinction between high and low culture can be applied to the classical Hollywood cinema only with difficulty however, since, like most forms of mass culture, it seems to have reached people of diverse classes, and ethnic and national traditions. Thus, clearly, A films were not geared solely to upper or middle-class sectors of the audience. Those patrons who could not afford to see *Gunga Din* at Radio City Music Hall at an admission price of at least 40 cents, could have waited to see it at the Albee in Brooklyn a month later for 25 cents. But while Hollywood did not make specific kinds of films for specific classes, it did mobilize cultural hierarchies in the distribution and marketing of features.

As I have noted, the distinction between A and B films established within the system of distribution was based both upon economic considerations and received notions of 'quality' and cultural importance. Bs in what were generally considered 'low'

³⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* trans. Richard Nice (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984) originally published in 1979 by Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris).

³⁵ Lawrence Levine traces the creation of this division in terms of the performance of Shakespeare, the creation of the symphony orchestra and the museum in *Highbrow–Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988). Francis Haskell refers to the elite audience for modern art and complicates what can become an all too neat equation between taste and class in 'The enemies of modern art' in *Past and Present in Art and Taste* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) pp. 207–21. Andrew Ross discusses the politics of the debate on the canon in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 210–12.

genres – animal stories, westerns, action and horror films – were much less likely to cross over into the A brackets. The horror films of Val Lewton, for example, were consistently screened as Bs, opening at the small Rialto theatre in New York and quickly relegated to split double and triple bills outside the New York metropolitan area. These films were generally dismissed by the critical establishment as well, despite the fact that critics Manny Farber and James Agee championed Lewton's work.³⁶

As the case of *The Great Man Votes* suggests, however, a culturally respectable form and subject matter, even given good reviews, was not enough to protect a film's A status if the studio stood to make greater profits through distributing other features in its choice first-run theatres. The marketplace thus played a powerful role in determining what was distributed as an A, and therefore in the definitions of 'quality' and of 'cheap and trashy pictures' which Hollywood produced.

³⁶ On the confinement of Lewton's films to B status in the forties see Joel Siegel *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror* (New York: Viking Press, 1973). The *New York Times* review of Lewton's *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943) is a good example of the dismissal of his work by the critical establishment, calling the film a dull, disgusting exaggeration of an unhealthy, abnormal concept of life. *New York Times*, 22 April 1943, p. 31. The film is now highly regarded, characterized by J. P. Telotte, for example, as 'the masterwork of the RKO [horror] series' in *Dreams of Darkness: Fantasy and the Films of Val Lewton* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 42.

Bangkok–Bahrain to Berlin–Jerusalem: Amos Gitai’s editing

PAUL WILLEMEN

Rephrasing Ricoeur and Foucault in one of the most illuminating essays of the eighties about the dynamics at work in Euro-American cultures, Andreas Huyssen wrote:

There is a growing awareness that other cultures, especially non-European and non-western cultures, must be met by means other than conquest or domination . . . This awareness will have to translate into a type of intellectual work different from that of the modernist intellectual who typically spoke with the confidence of standing at the cutting edge of time and of being able to speak for others. Foucault’s notion of the local and the specific intellectual as opposed to the ‘universal’ intellectual of modernity may provide a way out of the dilemma of being locked into our own culture and traditions while simultaneously recognizing their limitations.¹

¹ Andreas Huyssen: Mapping the postmodern. *New German Critique* no. 33 (1984), p. 34.

This quote is perhaps too grandiose a way of opening a modest discussion of a few points triggered by viewings of Amos Gitai’s extraordinary films and particularly of his documentary *Bangkok–Bahrain* (1984) about the physical exploitation of Thai people’s bodies, male and female, by different kinds of imperialisms (US, Europe, Arab). However, it allows me to begin by drawing attention to an increasingly pressing problem which faces cultural critics today: the fact that theory and criticism are intellectual practices very much tied to specific historical moments and

geographical locations. In other words, what I feel energized enough to try and theorize, the issues I feel compelled to address and the terms in which I address them, are significantly determined by the situation in which I live and work. In my case, that is contemporary Britain. While this is a readily acknowledged truism by most intellectuals, it is also something rarely taken into account in the actual formulation of our work.

As a local and specific intellectual working in Britain, there is no escaping the fact of cultural heterogeneity since the most vital aspects of cultural life there are to be found in the British Afro-Caribbean and British-Asian sectors (the plural is necessary because, as the compound terms suggest, the sectors do not constitute a homogeneous terrain). The cultural practices of Asian countries are also emerging as powerful challenges although their impact, except for that of the Islamic reactionaries aligned (for whatever reasons) with the Iranian government, still seems less forceful.

In such a context, it is perhaps not surprising that intellectuals faced with the need to meet other cultures in ways other than through conquest or domination are tempted to succumb to a kind of traumatic aphasia. In England especially, intellectuals have played very murky roles in history and the infamy of their politics has been used as a stick to beat all intellectual work without exception. This has made the life of the left intelligentsia in that country very difficult at the best of times. Over the last decade or so, throughout the 1980s, the main response of left intellectuals active in the 1970s has been to try and efface themselves altogether, to abdicate the function and responsibilities of intellectual work, traumatized by the overwhelming atmosphere of anti-intellectualism combined with the belated realization of the contradictions inherent in the very position of being simultaneously an intellectual and on the left, that is people who may have access to cinematic production, to video and to television, publishing, lecture platforms, and so on, but who are not aligned with the powers which control and occupy, in the military sense of the term, those media sites.

Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s there still was a kind of confidence of speaking from the cutting edge of changing times and of cultural development in the formulation of theories of cultural struggles, that confidence has evaporated, fortunately. But unfortunately, it has left a vacuum in its wake as many of the intellectuals concerned tried to prosper or were forced to find a way of surviving in the suffocating 1980s. Now, the vast majority of British filmmakers and video-makers as well as the cultural critics are either desperately trying to become invisible or to turn their coats and present themselves as celebrants of the consumer cultures associated with the triumph of finance capitalism in the western heartlands. Examples of these trends can be found in Sean Cubitt's

breathless ode to the ad-man's mental universe, *Timeshift*,² and in television programmes like *The Media Show* (Channel Four, 1987–91). For examples of intellectuals craving invisibility, see the numerous 'community' videos, often described as films, produced throughout UKania. The ones opting for invisibility tend to delude themselves into believing that they function merely as channels for others to speak through, that is 'the oppressed' or some such category. Any suggestion that intellectuals have a responsibility, by virtue of their education and social position, to exercise their intellectual skills and knowledges in order to analyse the dynamics at work in their social formation, is dismissed as 'elitist'. Instead, they stand aside to clear the way for the voices of the particular group they have chosen to identify with. At least, that is the fantasy. In fact, they do not stand aside at all but occupy the media space with repeated calls for intellectuals to submit to the injunction that their skills are to be discarded in favour of expressions emanating from an allegedly popular consciousness, as if that consciousness was not already deeply marked by the discourses and products of the media industries in the first place. The vast majority of those who might be left intellectuals no longer speak in that capacity. No doubt, there are some benefits to this stance: the voices coming through as a result are indeed often more interesting and intellectually astute than whatever the traumatized filmmakers and video-makers might have come up with themselves. The negative effect, however, is more crippling: an almost terroristic imposition of the crudest types of populism takes the place of intellectual analysis. In England today, a malevolently paranoid anti-intellectualism seeks to stifle any critical intellectual work, especially work critical of consumer cultures (see for instance the work of sociologists such as Valerie Walkerdine) while journals, papers and television are teeming with celebrants of shopping and devotees of the short-term, rapid-turnover (cultural) investment strategy characteristic of contemporary finance capital.

The brutalizing effects of this development are particularly noticeable in the area of documentary filmmaking, where many community and other 'left' media practitioners consider it almost a crime for a filmmaker to assume responsibility for his or her discourse and to be seen to be shaping an analytical discourse in the form of a film or a television programme. A case in point was the negative reaction from the liberal and left intelligentsia to the four-part film, *Nicaragua*, shown on Channel Four in 1985 and made by the best documentary filmmaker working in Britain today, Mark Karlin. What seemed to be most objectionable was the filmmaker's inclusion in the films of an exploration of the issues involved in the representation of Nicaragua, filmically or photographically, by non-Nicaraguans. Karlin had committed the cardinal sin of questioning the terms in which we produce and consume images.

It is because of the profoundly damaging effects of these developments that I want to turn to the work of the Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai, who is elaborating, alongside his work in fiction, a kind of essayistic filmmaking particularly relevant to us in Europe (but elsewhere also) in the late twentieth century.

In a situation where television has become virtually the only source of money as well as providing the main channels of exhibition for film, different registers of audio-visual discourse are emerging with different implications as to the mode of attention they invite and require. Gitai's films are made with television money and mostly transmitted via television but they nevertheless require a cinematic mode of attention. That is to say, they require a considerable amount of concentration over extended periods of time, close attention being paid to editing patterns, camera-movements, composition in depth and lighting patterns.

Traditionally, editing has been used and discussed as a way of limiting ambiguity, as a way of making sure that the viewers follow and receive as exclusively as possible the sense filmmakers want the viewers to receive. In other words, editing is used primarily to impose, as far as this is possible, a reading. More recently, in music and other advertising television, editing has been subordinated to the music track and is used to enjoin people to 'stop making sense' as they are asked to absorb and live by 'moods'. Both the imposition and the prevention of sense-making illustrate the manipulatively authoritarian aspect of editing which was given one of its most sophisticated formulations in Eisenstein's early writings and in his theory of montage. The issue of editing's implicit authoritarianism was the bone of contention between, for instance, Eisenstein and Bazin who argued for Christian Democratic sequence-shots and deep focus compositions.

Although it is true that editing is a manipulative technique staking out the path the reader/viewer is supposed to follow, the matter is slightly more complex, as Eisenstein himself acknowledged in his discussions of colour and frame composition. The point is that in cinema, a multiplicity of codes operates to generate meaning, of which the cuts, propelling viewers from one bundle of meanings to another, is perhaps the main but not the only code. Moreover, these cuts acquire meaning only in relation to the disposition, the montage of signifying elements within the shots, so that it might be more accurate, as far as cinema is concerned anyway, to talk of the orchestration of meaning. Again, the current and increasingly dominant forms of television seek to reduce the complexity of this orchestration by reducing the pertinent field of vision and therefore of potential meanings almost exclusively to the human face and torso. The result is the almost total loss of any notion of cinema as television-derived aesthetics swamp all forms of audio-visual discourse: actorial 'character' drama narrated in close shots or

advertising-inspired kitschy showiness are the norm. Engagement with a sense of place or time has to make way for an exclusive focus on quirky individuals. Time and again, we are forced to detour through an identification with some allegedly interesting character or person if we are to be granted access to the sociocultural forces that structure the situations these characters inhabit. Worse: most of the time we are denied any access at all to some engagement with the forces shaping the world we live in as we are stuck with our noses against samples of warm and wonderful humanity emoting in close-up.

Gitai's films, together with those of a number of other prominent but still fairly unfamiliar filmmakers such as Chantal Akerman, Ousmane Sembene, Ritwik Ghatak, David and Judith McDougall, deploy a type of orchestration of meaning not often discussed but crucially important for the artistic as well as the intellectual value of the medium. In Gitai's films, as in Mark Karlin's, the authorial voice is neither authoritarian nor effaced. Instead, the films are marked by a strategy of address that tries to mobilize meanings rather than impose them. It works with the cultural and the political knowledges assumed to be present in the viewer, calling on non-automatic, non-normative ways of deciphering one's environment. The process of meaning production is activated by working with, as well as upon, the viewer's skills and knowledges, trying to re-articulate them into better, more complex and comprehensive ways of making sense of and with the materials presented. The viewer is not manipulated nor is he/she left to his/her 'own' devices, which invariably are the devices made available and strenuously advocated by and in the daily press and by television's cultural functionaries. Instead, a kind of dialogue is set up between filmmaker and viewer in which the filmmaker proposes a way of making sense but simultaneously invites critical attention to the way this is done, regularly pausing to allow the reader/viewer to check the proceedings.

This in-between way of proceeding, in-between intellectual and mood manipulation, is rather difficult to define or even to describe. An example may help to clarify the point. Think of a medium long-shot held for a considerable length of time, with or without camera-movement, such as a sequence shot. During the viewing of such a shot, complex changes occur in our mode of attention to what is depicted as we begin to take in aspects of the scene normally overlooked (that is aspects of the scene we have been dishabituated from attending to) such as background details, changes of light, ambient sounds, landscape details, and so on. The scene comes alive as our relation to the seen is activated as a significant component of our viewing experience. The cognitive value of the scene changes as we work with the whole range of the materials on offer. Often, the effect of such a scene/sequence shot will be to allow the characters

in it (if there are any) to begin functioning 'in context' as we begin to become aware of the environment within which the character operates and which, precisely because we are given the opportunity to attend to the environmental details, codetermines in important ways the nature and status of that character itself. In such a sequence, individuals are allowed to be seen as social beings existing within and marked by very specific geo-social circumstances. We are no longer forced to detour our attention through 'identification' with a character in order to gain access to the fiction or to the signified world. The emotional relations between character and viewer is no longer at the centre of the picture. Instead, the relation between a character and its context, presented perhaps not as all-determining but at least as very significant, becomes the focus of attention. The emotive realism banking on character identification has thus been by-passed and its equally restrictive obverse, the foregrounding of the process of enunciation, is thus avoided as well. In other words, this strategy of address is neither realist nor modernist in the traditional senses of those terms in cultural theory.

Instead of requiring us to submit to the inexorably sequenced bits of meaning strung together fast enough to disallow any attention to the textures and to the actual substance of the meanings and moods we are asked to undergo, this type of orchestration relies on complex interactions, spread over time, between a scene and its viewer. One could almost call it dialogic if that term had not been rendered meaningless by its fashionable over-use and misuse. In the spaces where we notice the processes of construction, the filmmaker says 'I' and addresses us as interlocutors as well as witnesses. The marks of enunciation are there, as they are in conventional modernism, but contrary to the modernist styles, they are subordinated to the essayistic discourse and the referential argument it is conducting. In that sense, Gitai's films present a discourse about a topic in the form of an argument, rather than an order, addressed to us. The film does not shrivel into empty rhetoric if we disagree with aspects of the argument: we can still work with the materials presented to formulate other arguments, other 'senses'. Moreover, the argument presented is embedded in such richly and complexly detailed sets of relations deployed at a pace that allows for contemplation and reflection, that the authorial voice is itself somewhat displaced. It is no longer a case of the author, with or without the use of voice-over narration, marshalling images and sounds to buttress his or her argument, but the presentation of pertinent along with ancillary facets of a set of interconnected issues about which the authorial voice offers a by no means always clear-cut position. The author can thus assume full responsibility for the discourse constructed without having to hide behind a bogus neutrality (as in, for example, Fred Wiseman's documentaries) or the pyrotechnics of flashy enunciation strategies (Godard, for

example), the two best-known alternatives to the routinely authoritarian practices of 'social concern' films. Gitai provides a nudging, essentially friendly kind of discourse, acknowledging the presence alongside him of the viewer and assuming a shared interest in the attempt to understand, to make sense of the particular social processes the film is about

After making *Ananas* (1983), a documentary using one particular commodity, the pineapple, to trace relations of exploitation, imperialism and resistance in the era of transnational capitalism, Gitai made *Bangkok-Bahrain*. He shows and discusses the dislocations brought about in Thailand by the US attack on Vietnam and then goes on to discuss the use of female and male Thai bodies, the former in the Bangkok sex-tourism industry, the latter in the Middle Eastern construction industry which has its own brand of pimps – traffickers in migrant labour. Up to this point, the film proceeded with fairly long, meandering shots, sometimes with a static camera as we listen to someone's story. The camera has remained primarily observational, in the position of a visitor who is not always welcome and who tactfully keeps his distance.

Then we encounter this extraordinary sequence shot: it starts with a televisual framing of a trafficker seated behind a desk as he is interviewed on camera. He is lit in the standard television manner in medium close up as he replies to some questions about his unsavoury job. Then, as the filmmaker asks a question referring to a previous conversation not shown in the film, the camera hesitantly but doggedly pans right and reveals the man's wife, sitting in the corner of the room, not properly lit at all and obviously expecting to remain out of the frame. Pinned to the wall by the camera movement, she responds to the question. But suddenly, the whole situation has changed by this obvious infringement by the filmmakers of an agreement that must have been made prior to filming – the agreement not to film her, demonstrated by the absence of professional lighting. To debate whether this agreement was made explicitly or not is beside the point since the initial set-up and the lights make it clear that she was in a no-film area. The pan, resulting in the 'badly lit' image of the wife, the hesitation before her reply, the phrasing of the question referring to a previous conversation, the confusion shown by the husband as the camera shifts away from him, all this suddenly addresses the viewer, telling us something about repression, censorship and the difficulty of filming social relations in operation, as it were. It also reveals that the conventional television-image was based on the suppression of an essential bit of information: the man was to be filmed as if his discourse was 'open', spontaneous and autonomous, with nothing to hide. In addition, the length of the sequence gives the viewer plenty of time to absorb the implications, on various levels, of the changes

brought about by the pan. The filmmaker's choices are made available for scrutiny but, more importantly, the interviewed individuals have ceased being simply individuals: they have been transformed into agents in and of a social situation. They have become representatives of a social order which includes and produces them. One could say they have come to function as signifiers of a repressive order and an exploitative system hiding in plain sight. Conventional television techniques would have required the adherence to the obfuscations set in place by the interviewees or would have lit the whole room and used fast stock to enable the handheld camera to roam throughout the room without hitting any unlit areas. Either option would have significantly impoverished the scene, aesthetically as well as intellectually, if those two aspects can be separated at all.

The camera movement marks a shift from the dialogue between filmmaker and filmed people, which is the standard contract we see in operation in nearly all television, to a three-way relationship between the filmed, the filmmakers and the viewers, inserting that relationship in its turn into the whole problem of 'filming social relations'. In that sense, it is a critique of television documentaries and current-affairs programmes as well as of the propagandistic moralizing characteristic of the populist videos which lack any sense of the dimensions of *mise-en-scène* essential to any notion of critical 'social' filmmaking. It may be worth mentioning that after this audacious shot, Gitai and his crew quickly went to the airport and left the country: during the interview it was revealed that the man interviewed was an ex-cop and a former censor while his wife described herself as involved in the security business. This sequence shot is an example of a courageous (left) intellectual at work with cinema. He does not tell us what to think but leaves us in no doubt as to what he thinks while providing a complex representation of a situation for us to argue with. The filmed people are not reduced to pawns in the filmmaker's discourse of self-righteous indignation either: they are allowed to have their say and are shown as *metteurs-en-scène* themselves, that is as people who not only engineer other people's lives but who advocate an alternative kind of *mise-en-scène*.

The pan also stresses something few films and virtually no television programme ever acknowledges: the relation of otherness *vis-à-vis* the filmed. A filmmaker experiences but usually hides in the finished product. The images are not illustrations of a preformed discourse on the topic, whether delivered on the sound-track or not. Instead, Gitai shows us a way of making sense of an unfamiliar situation while participating in it and he takes the viewer in his confidence provided we are prepared to pay attention to the modes of enunciation and their implications. To arrange the same sequence into a series of separate, edited shots would have

destroyed its productivity and made it into a sequence of bits dished out for us to follow obediently, linearly, ingesting whatever the filmmaker wants us to swallow before getting a chance to reflect on the situation itself

A little later in the same film, Gitai resorts to a different strategy but achieves a very similar effect. He shows a series of fairly brief shots depicting workers and in each shot the filmed people give only one single bit of information – their nationality. No other interaction between filmers and filmed appears possible and the otherness of the filmmakers is writ large. As if exasperated by this inability to establish contact with the workers (the owner of the building contracting firm in Bahrain freely interacts with the filmmakers), the sequence culminates in a shot where the camera appears encased in a dark space, leaving only a small square of light with the heads of a few workers peering into the dark space below them, that is, towards the camera. One worker can be seen stretching his neck to get a better look of the camera. The camera seems torn out of any social context in this dark, enclosed space. It is removed from the scene, which is somewhere beyond the small square of daylight up above. Together with the viewer, who shares the camera's position and point of view in its own kind of dark, asocial space, gazing at a lit square high in front of its eyes, the camera becomes an object of curiosity rather than an investigator. This sudden reversal of the camera's position and authority sets up a dialogue with the viewer, also barred from interaction with the filmed workers, but simultaneously enables the filmmakers to engage in a dialogue with the workers, as if the removal of the filmmakers and their camera from the social relations at work in the area was the price that had to be paid in order to enter into such a dialogue. After that shot, it is no longer necessary to specify at length that the filmmakers were allowed to film in Bahrain as long as they did not actively interact with the workers. This point has been made in the very *mise-en-scène* of the shot, signalling the gulf between 'us' (filmmakers and viewers) and 'them' (dislocated workers subjected to an extremely repressive situation).

In each of these two examples, Gitai is betting on what the viewers will think of the situation presented along with the presentation of that situation. He is taking for granted our interest in critical, analytical looking and he assumes we will accord the images and sounds a degree of critical attention not normally given to television images, even though that is where the film will be seen by most people. He banks on a cinematic mode of attention in the sense that the forms of the discourse, such as at times quite small changes in the position of the camera, the pacing of the shots, or their place in a particular sequence will be noticed and thought significant. If we do not give these aspects of the discourse their full weight, the complexity of the social mechanisms filmed will escape

us as well. We are not told what to think and neither are we asked to discover everything by ourselves (which always was a particularly cowardly and hypocritical aesthetic ideology anyway): Gitai films in a conversational mode, including his interlocutors. Should a viewer refuse or be too damaged intellectually to engage in this conversation, the films are transformed into somewhat slow, rather disorienting documentaries.

At the same time, this strategy has the merit of refusing to adopt a touristic point of view, the filmmaker inviting the viewer to attend to his ruminations illustrated by local-colour shots linking bits of talking-head footage, as is customary in the vast majority of social-concern videos as well as in television journalism. Gitai thus shows up the insufficiencies – filmic as well as political and intellectual – that cripple both the dominant, touristic forms of documentary current-affairs television and the currently most widely practised alternative form of journalism – the pretence of effacing the voice of the filmmaker in favour of the ‘authentic’ voice of the people, an alternative that is at best hopelessly naive.

Finally, there is one more point I would like to make arising out of Gitai’s filmmaking. Current debates in Euro-American film theory make a lot of play of point-of-view shots as ways of positioning the viewer in relation to the filmed. In many respects, discussions and analyses of point of view have taken the place of the former discussions about subjectivity and editing. Gitai’s films, amongst others, show that it is most decidedly not through point-of-view shots that we are mobilized, but through the differences between, for instance, one point of view and another, even within the one shot. The dialogue with the viewer, which is the film’s mode of address, is to be traced in the pattern of differences, in the shifts between markers such as the point of view manifested in the body of the text. That is where we learn who the filmmaker thinks he/she is talking to and what he/she thinks we know or are interested in.

Gitai’s films assume an audience that is cine-literate in the best sense of the term: an audience that is interested in concentrating on the audio-visual discourse, on the way it is formulated as much as it is interested in finding out how social relations have shaped whatever is being filmed. The films most definitely do not assume that we are interested only in looking at the strangeness of others nor is the viewer assumed to be interested in judging the people represented as ‘goodies’ or as ‘baddies’. On the contrary, the films begin to make sense only when we regard the people represented as social creatures rather than as individuals in the conventional sense. We are not invited to give moral value judgements on the people but to understand why and how they have come to be the way they are (by extension, the films ask us the same question). In other words, people are represented as shaped by social existence in all its contradictoriness with the consequent possibilities for change that

such a view implies since the social itself is presented as a field in constant flux. Nothing is more alien to a Gitai film than the populist presentation of oppressed people as idealized victims. Even the historicity of filmmaking itself, the fact that different social formations circumscribe different practices and possibilities of filming, is part and parcel of Gitai's cinematic practice

Although these techniques were developed in context of a documentary practice, its lessons apply just as much to fiction cinema, where a subtle orchestration of time and space can be used to convey a sense of place, opening up the setting, the city-scapes and landscapes, to an awareness of historically accrued meanings. Gitai achieved this in his first feature film, *Esther* (1986) by setting a Biblical story in a recognizable and memory-laden part of contemporary Haifa, giving the viewers ample opportunity to savour the political sense generated by the mobilization of this particular place for this particular story. In his next feature, *Berlin-Jerusalem* (1989), Gitai charts what happens to utopian desires while affirming the need to have them. With impressive images (courtesy of Henri Alekan and Nurith Aviv), Gitai tells of the Expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schuler's yearning for an idealized Jerusalem, and of the Bolshevik Mania Shochat who went to Palestine and helped set up a rural cooperative, eventually becoming the main left opposition figure in Ben Gurion's Israel.

Instead of trying to re-stage the familiar Weimar iconography, Gitai uses a kind of cinematic shorthand, evoking the period through references, activating our memory-banks full of representations of the period and the place. As he conjures up the Weimar setting in beautifully stylized sequences, Gitai simultaneously rearranges our perception of the Weimar period by putting into place three different but connected spaces. Our collective imaginary made up of half-remembered films, photographs and paintings provides the broadly historical setting; this imaginary space is then displaced and somehow hollowed out by the menacingly empty and shadowy spaces surrounding the poet in the first half of the film while her private sense of claustrophobia and oppression is evident from the cramped and cluttered spaces of her private life. In two strongly emotional moments, Else escapes from these imbricated spaces: when she goes to the seaside and when she buries her son in a wintry graveyard, a moment marked by the complex tracking shot looking up through leafless trees at a pale sky.

The Mania plot-strand is also spatially circumscribed, from the trek across the foggy mountains to the place where the small group of pioneers set up their farming collective. From then on, the real but understated drama is in the way their farm-space intersects with the Palestinian spaces around it. The film charts the gradually increasing sense of separation together with the way such an isolated

group living in backbreakingly difficult circumstances tries to weld itself together. *Mania* is the one with the most politically acute sense of the contradictions and dangers involved in such an attempt to act out utopian wishes: however much the members of the collective try to divest themselves from previous ways of living, people cannot but bring with them cultural and personal ways of being and thinking which undermine the utopian aspirations. In the end, the political battle is over the way a particular state organization will seek to enshrine and contain these tensions. The film ends more or less where the tragic dimension of the Israeli state begins, having shown that there were different options for that state. The relevance of the film to current political issues cannot be underestimated. It is the most explicit cinematic statement to date of a position which receives all too little exposure in either cinema or television: by showing the ideological as well as the experiential elements that were – and are – active in the formation of the Israeli state, Gitai points to the possibility and indeed the necessity of a *different* state formation, adjusted more realistically to the actual needs and conditions prevailing in the area. The film is neither pro-Israeli nor pro-Palestinian. In that respect, Gitai's film is a contribution to the growing debate about what it means to be an Israeli citizen and what the options in fact are.

Other films made elsewhere (in Taiwan, India, Ireland, and so on) are also concerned with cinema's ability to render the complexities of time-space relations in such a way as to make us see spaces in which history can be seen at work, transforming spaces shaped by the encounter between social forces, personal experience and landscape. Gitai's films blur the distinction conventionally made between documentary and fiction: the sophisticated use of settings and location developed in his documentary practice is transferred into his features. At the same time as raising the question of the relation between the telling of particular stories and contemporary historical issues, this strategy brings that thorny problem into sharp focus by directly addressing the generation and the historical-geographical reach of a particular set of cultural forms such as, for instance, Biblical texts. In this way, the films also ask the question, rarely raised in cinema, of the social construction of audiences while exploring the social construction of cultures. Hollywood and mainstream television solve those questions by reducing the cultural milieu to a picturesque backdrop for its dramas of individual character (and even those individuals are presented in exceedingly vague terms in order to make them internationally consumable). This reduces cultural meanings to those available to the average tourist. On the other hand, Euro-American experimental cinema contents itself with addressing specific subcultures while trading on generalities about art and aesthetic ideologies familiar throughout the West. Gitai, in common with Kumar Shahani and Ritwik

Ghatak (at least in this respect), asks fundamental questions about the social aspects of cinema at what point does a cinema betray its audiences by expecting them to become tourists in their own cultures? What is the effective geographical reach of the cultural materials a film is fashioned from and which it addresses? How to mobilize culturally specific meanings without at the same time restricting audiences to uneconomic levels? It is obvious from these questions that the answers imply political and ideological analyses rather than (or as well as) economic-industrial judgements. In effect, Gitaï's films open up a whole new perspective on cinema itself: a new way of assessing how films are shaped by the tensions between their industrial and their cultural aspects

I would like to close by stressing that in my view Gitaï is a rare filmmaker, one of an as yet small number whose work comes across both on television and in cinema by practising and requiring a fundamentally cinematic mode of attention to the audio-visual representation of social situations. In other words, he shows that television does not have to be as brutalizingly reductive as it is at the moment. In addition, his approach to essayistic filmmaking respects the otherness of specific sociocultural formations but he does not allow himself to be traumatized by that otherness. His kind of conversational filmmaking offers one way out of the dilemma of being a local-specific intellectual locked into his own culture while being sufficiently outside of that culture to recognize its limiting boundaries. It may not be the only way out, but it is the only one that I can point to as an example which today's British filmmakers could benefit from considerably. I suspect that his approach could also hold valuable lessons for filmmakers elsewhere.

From *Casablanca* to *Pretty Woman*: the politics of romance

ROBERT LAPSLEY and MICHAEL WESTLAKE

*Entre l'homme et l'amour,
Il y a la femme
Entre l'homme et la femme,
Il y a un monde
Entre l'homme et le monde,
Il y a un mur
Antoine Tudel*

*God took a rib from Adam and made Eve Now maybe men chase
women to get the rib back When God took the rib he left a big
hole there A place where there used to be something, and the
women have that Now maybe a man is not complete as a man
without a woman.*

Johnny (Nicholas Cage) in *Moonstruck* (1987)

The myth of romance

Between the final embrace in *Pretty Woman* (1990) and the credit sequence the camera pans away from the romantically united couple and tracks alongside a street person chanting 'This is Hollywood, the land of dreams. Some dreams come true, some don't, but keep on dreaming . . .'. The effect of this framing reprise is retrospectively to introduce a measure of irony into an otherwise traditional form. Termed 'double coding' by Umberto Eco, it permits expression that would otherwise be risible in an age of lost

1 Quoted by Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1986) p. 18

innocence, as when – to use Eco's example – the lover declares, 'As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly.'¹ By deliberately announcing itself as a fairy tale, *Pretty Woman* succeeds in bridging the contradiction faced by the spectator who is no longer able to believe in romance (especially in a film so beset with implausibility and inconsistency), yet at the same time wishes to do so.

For there can be little doubt our culture does want romance and the promise of happiness it brings. Romantic films with their basic structure of boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl, pop songs whose I/you address envelops the listener in the dream of fulfilment; romantic literature, even television-serial advertisements where the unfolding narrative poses the 'will they? won't they?' question over cups of instant coffee – all testify to the saturation of contemporary culture with the myth of romance. People do not fantasize about what they have got; the omnipresence of romance points to the absence of the sexual relation. The notion of an intrinsic absence pertaining to human sexuality was signalled by Freud, but only with Lacan did it become an inescapable consequence of the construction of subjectivity through language: '... in the case of the speaking being the relation between the sexes does not take place'.²

If there is one thematically dominant strain within American narrative cinema, it lies precisely in the denial of this – the sexes are complementary, and this harmony is nowhere more perfectly figured than in romantic love. In short, Hollywood is the pretence that the sexual relation exists. Clearly not every Hollywood film makes such an assertion and equally there are many films made outside Hollywood that share its romantic view of sexuality, but given this thematic dominance we shall limit our examples to romance within American popular cinema. Romance does not deny that there is a lack, but it claims that it can be made good. In *Pretty Woman*, Edward (Richard Gere), with his failed relationships and his parasitical business, is transformed by Vivien (Julia Roberts) into a decent human being who is able to 'make things', while she acquires from him the culture, status, wealth and love which are notably absent from her life as a prostitute and which the film's moral economy makes evident that someone as fundamentally nice as her deserves.

Absence of sexual relation

The possibility of such reciprocal completion is precisely what Lacan questions, relations of non-reciprocity are 'co-extensive with the formation of the subject',³ more bleakly still, 'love is impossible'.⁴ Only within the imaginary can lack be made good; the real for Lacan is this hole around which human life is organized and which can never be filled, even – or least of all – by romantic love.

3 Jacques Lacan 'Kant avec Sade' trans. James B. Swenson Jr. *October* no. 51 (1989), p. 62

4 Jacques Lacan 'A love letter' trans. Jacqueline Rose in Mitchell and Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality* p. 158

Shocking though such a stance may seem, it is less contrary to common sense than may be at first supposed. It is consistent with everyday observation, in that romantic love seen from the outside is fraught with illusion, that lovers' estimation of what their life together will be like is deeply unrealistic, that their mutual valuation is absurdly inflated, and that in representing their love they are pretending something exists that really does not. Equally it has been the concern of much western art, of which two well known twentieth-century paintings may serve as examples. Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* depicts the woman and her several suitors in two unconnected spaces, each with its own apparatus and activities, unable to communicate, with the only unity being the imaginary one of their dreams. Again, in a recent analysis by Rosine and Robert Lefort of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, it is argued that the painting is an attempt to represent the unrepresentable – the real as impossibility (not least of sexual rapport) – and that the horror evoked by the painting in Picasso's circle was due to his metonymic imagery of fundamental lack in the Other represented by the prostitutes.⁵ The nose of the female figure crouching on the right of the canvas is, on this reading, 'a pacifying signifier', a means of exorcizing the horror of lack by representing it within the imaginary of the painting.

5 Rosine and Robert Lefort *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, *Ornicar?*, no. 46 (1988), pp. 81–92.

The absence of sexual relation has also been a recurrent theme in cinema, of which Godard's later films provide an instance. Whereas in Godard's early work sexual rapport is absent not because of its intrinsic impossibility but because of the failings of the man (*Le Mépris* [1963]) or more usually the woman (*Breathless* [1959], *Pierrot le Fou* [1965]), by the time of *Sauve Qui Peut* (1980) any confidence in the contingency of this absence has evaporated. While a certain mystery may remain around the woman, it is a mystery to which men have no access; otherwise, the emblematic way men relate to women is by hitting them, while women relate to men by leaving them. Popular as well as high culture is equally cognizant of this absence, as evidenced by comedians whose stock in trade are jokes about failed relationships (Woody Allen, for instance) or Rita Rudner's comment that the secret of a successful relationship is to let him be himself and to pretend he's someone else – a line that echoes Sophia Loren's remark that sex appeal is fifty per cent what you've got and fifty per cent what he thinks you've got. As a corollary to such widely shared scepticism about the possibility of sexual relationship is the disbelief or unease experienced at implausible happy endings (*Mildred Pierce* [1945], *White Palace* [1991]) or many scenes purportedly depicting sexual harmony (Steve MacQueen driving Faye Dunaway around in his beach buggy in *The Thomas Crowne Affair* [1968], Bruce Willis serenading Kim Basinger on his guitar in *Blind Date* [1987]).

Lacan's pessimistic conclusion was drawn not from clinical

6 Jacques Lacan 'L'etourdir',
Scilicet 4 (Paris: Éditions de
 Seuil 1973), p. 11

experience (although this could hardly fail to have confirmed and quite possibly inspired his thinking on the topic), but was rather the outcome of his rereading of Freud. The proposition that 'there is no sexual relation' was first stated in the seminar *La Logique du Fantasma* (1966–7) and was a central point of reference from then until *Les Non-dupes Errent* (1973–4).⁶ It was, however, implicit in his work from a much earlier stage, in his thinking on the formation of the human subject, three moments of which are relevant here, all of them centrally concerned with lack.

Misrecognition

In the first of these Lacan elaborated the so-called mirror phase, which is so well known as to require only the briefest of recapitulations. Prior to achieving motor control, the entirely dependent human infant anticipates the control and unity it has not yet attained (and indeed never will) by assuming an image of itself. But to do so is to be caught up in misrecognition, the image is a mirage, the subject in becoming captured by its image is alienated. For there is always a discordance between the body and the assumed image, an absence that Lacan would later term *objet a*. Although at this stage Lacan made little reference to the question of the sexual relation, the state of being in love was seen as involving the misrecognition and narcissism of the mirror phase. Like the infant's anticipated yet never attained unity, the lovers' dream of harmonious wholeness belongs to the imaginary, is nothing more than 'a reciprocal mutually agreeable self-deception'.⁷ (When in *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* [1985] Becky (Tracy Arnold) looks into the eyes of the man who will inevitably kill her and murmurs how she feels she has always known him, her tragedy is that her misrecognition means that she never will.) One further aspect of Lacan's thinking in this moment, which prefigures his later ideas, concerns the role of the Other in determining the subject's self-image. For it is the signifiers of the parent holding the child in front of the mirror which determines its identification with the alienating image. In assuming an identity assigned by the Other, the child both sees the world from its own subjective viewpoint while being denied the viewpoint of the gaze of the constituting Other. Thus to be a subject is to be looked at from somewhere other than the position from which one sees. What is desired in love is to be seen by the Other as one wishes to be seen, to overcome the split between the eye of the subject and the gaze of the Other. But this can be achieved only in the Imaginary. Insofar as it is a bid to determine what is determining, it is impossible.

7 Stuart Schneiderman, 'Art as symptom: a psychoanalytic study of art' in Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (eds), *Lacan and Criticism* (Athens and London: Georgia University Press 1990), p. 209.

Aphanisis

Subsequently Lacan was to recast his conception of the Other that pre-exists and determines the subject in terms of language – it was now the symbolic order inscribing the laws of society. In shifting the emphasis onto the subject's relation to the signifier and the signifying chain, Lacan also reconceived castration as the effect of language upon the subject, rather than as a threat emanating from the father. Thus conceived, castration has two dimensions: alienation and separation.

The first of these stems from the fact that the subject does not control his or her representation in the signifying chain, since the signifier S_1 representing the subject is given its value by another signifier S_2 . Divided between the signifiers S_1 and S_2 , the subject therefore emerges in the signifying chain only to fade. Although dependent on the signifier the subject is not a signifier, hence is at once included and excluded from language, endlessly displaced along the signifying chain in pursuit of the (nonexistent) signifier that would fully represent it. Just as the subject is unable to coincide with its image, so the subject of the enounced is unable to coincide with the subject of the enunciation. This disappearance of the subject was termed aphanisis by Lacan.

Castration entails not only that the subject is divided and alienated but also that it is separated from its living being, something vital is lost in entering language. This was described at one stage of Lacan's thinking in terms of an evacuation of *jouissance* from the subject's body. What remains, what cannot be inscribed in the signifying chain is *objet a*; which has led Jacques-Alain Miller to posit an equivalence between it and the subject.⁸ Developing this idea, Michel Sylvestre has proposed that the subject 'is either a lack, a hole in the signifier (–1) or an object. In both cases it is real, that is to say excluded from the symbolic.'⁹

Thus this moment in Lacan's thinking can be understood in terms of the three registers, symbolic, real and imaginary. In being represented within the symbolic, something of the subject is missing and this can be equated with the *objet a*, which in turn is the real of the subject, that which cannot be symbolized. The imaginary consists in the forever elusive objects that the subject believes will make good the lack. There is in other words a necessarily failed dialectic in entering the symbolic, in becoming a subject: once divided there can be no return to the lost unity; 'sublation is one of those sweet dreams of philosophy'.¹⁰ None of which prevents the subject from trying, indeed the *manque à être* expressive of the subject's lack acts as a spur to search for *objet a*. Such a search, whose guidelines are framed by fantasy, always fails, indeed must do so since otherwise 'it would end the division of the subject from the object and bring about the death of the subject'.¹¹ Every encounter

8 Jacques-Alain Miller 'Montre a premontré' *Analytica* no 37 (1984) pp 28–9

9 Michel Sylvestre 'A la rencontre du réel' in his *Demain la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Navarin 1987) p 307

10 Lacan 'A love letter' p 158

11 Sylvestre 'A la rencontre du réel' p 312

with *objet a* is therefore a failed encounter: which is another way of saying there is no sexual relation.

The recasting of the concept of the Other has profound implications for the relations between the sexes. Whereas for the earlier Lacan the Other was the other person and the problem was the illusions entertained about that person, in the later formulation the Other is language. The lack in the Other produces a barred subject $\$$, who has no recourse but to pursue the lost *objet a* in its imaginary mode within another person. Because this object is always already lost, the other person is encountered as lacking; man and woman are 'one for the other the Other'.¹² Sexual relation exists therefore only in the imaginary and only insofar as each pretends to be what will make good the lack in the Other. Any semblance of sexual rapport thus hinges on the phallus, the pretence that the *objet a* exists in a form capable of making good the lack: the man must appear to have it, the woman must engage in the masquerade that she is it (We shall return to the evident asymmetry involved here in the concluding section.) Consequently, for both the man and the woman, Lacan can say, loving is giving what they do not have, and the manifestations of it 'are entirely propelled into comedy'.¹³

¹² Mireille Ardres *Lacan et la Question du Métalangage* (Paris: Point Hors Lugne, 1987) p. 76

¹³ Jacques Lacan 'The meaning of the phallus' trans. Jacqueline Rose in Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, p. 84

La chose

A third moment in Lacanian theory turns on the concept of *la chose*, which was introduced in his seminar on ethics and which since his death has become the focus for increasing attention, in particular from Bernard Baas and Alain Juranville. *La chose* may be defined preliminarily in terms of the primordial mother, not as a plenitude that is subsequently lost with the intervention of the father, but rather the desiring mother, the mother as lacking, the real Other. Here Lacan breaks with both Freud and Melanie Klein, who in their different ways held that the child experiences satisfaction through the mother and will therefore subsequently seek objects that are in the last analysis substitutes for the mother's body. For Lacan, the encounter with *la chose* is the encounter with an originary and fundamental lack, the experience of which, however, paradoxically gives rise to the myth of lost plenitude, because 'the loss is anterior to what is lost'.¹⁴ That is to say, it is the original experience of loss that accounts both for desire and for the myth of the lost paradise where desire was unknown. Belonging to the real, *la chose* may be elaborated as both the promise of an absolute plenitude and, when encountered, the experience of its lack.

Insofar as the mother is lacking, she is a signifier, and the subject who will emerge – and is always already in the signifying chain – is confronted with the question of what it is she wants, of what is the signified of the desire of the maternal signifier. This can only be

¹⁴ Bernard Baas, 'Le désir pur', *Ornicar?*, no. 43 (1987) p. 71

15 Alain Juranville, *Lacan et la Philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1984), p. 133

what she lacks, namely the phallus, which is defined as the signifier with no signified (because as that which will make good the lack in the Other, it signifies what does not exist). By posing him or herself as the phallus, the subject becomes a signifier in relation to the signifier of the mother, but only from the perspective of the Other. And the subject no more coincides with this signifier than with any other, subjection to this signifier too involves castration. 'The subject is the phallus for the Other, but for himself he is castrated.'¹⁵ Thus the experience of *la chose* results in castration. On entering the signifying chain the subject is separated from *objet a* (which remains as the trace of *la chose*), and the fiction is born of the lost object that will make good the lack. For by taking the place of *la chose*, *objet a* both masks the absence of absolute *jouissance* and makes it possible to believe it exists. Unreconciled to the imaginary lack, the subject pursues a unity that never was – once again there is no sexual relation. Equally without lack there would be no subject: *la chose* is thus the void around which the subject is structured. Hence the man approaches the woman demanding she be *la chose* as plenitude but experiences only *la chose* as pure lack in encountering the real Other.

History

Before leaving this exposition of Lacan we shall address a possible objection to this paper, that the theory of the subject we are using is ahistorical. While it is true that all human subjects are divided and experience *manque à être*, it is not the case that lack always manifests itself in the same way. Indeed, since desire is the desire of the Other and since there are many Others, there can only be a diversity of responses to castration among individuals (whose experience of the Other is always unique). Psychoanalysis is 'the science of the particular'. At the same time there is a measure of generalization possible, insofar as individuals share a culture or cultures. Indeed it is not every culture that seeks to make good the lack through romance. In a recent radio broadcast Geoffrey Hawthorn pointed out that only in western culture are relations of love between individuals held to be the supreme form of self-expression, an idea that would be ludicrous to non-western cultures.¹⁶ Even in the West the fantasy about romance is historically a relatively recent phenomenon that until this century was confined to certain frequently privileged social groups. In fact it seems reasonable to suppose that for most people, lacking adequate food, shelter, health and rest, the satisfaction of these basic needs functioned as a lure for the imagined abolition of lack. Only in the twentieth century did mass culture, notably cinema and popular music, extend the myth of romance to all social classes. But

16 Geoffrey Hawthorn speaking on *Analysis*, BBC Radio 4 23 December 1990

whatever the historical context, for Lacan any turn to romantic love is culturally determined – hence his approving citation as ‘an authentic recognition of what love owes to the symbol’ of La Rochefoucauld’s remark that there are people who would never have been in love if they had not heard talk of it.¹⁷

17 Jacques Lacan ‘The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis’ trans Alan Sheridan in *Écrits* (London: Tavistock, 1977) p. 54

Idealization

Given the lack in the Other, the Lacanian subject is at once divided as the effect of language (\$) and the remainder left over from the division (*objet a*). The bid to overcome division can only occur in fantasy (since division is the condition of the subject’s existence) – the formula for which $\$ \diamond a$, puts the two elements into relation. Thus fantasy seeks to mask the lack in the Other by supposing that subject and object can be united. Out of the many fantasies offered by Hollywood, our specific concern is with the fantasy of sexual rapport, which itself is implemented by a variety of strategies. We shall limit our analysis to a discussion of just two of such elements: the establishment of figures that function to mask the lack in the Other, and romantic narrative structures.

Among figures disguising the lack in the Other, a first category comprises strong, self-sufficient characters, who are predominantly male – roles typically played by such actors as John Wayne, Clint Eastwood and Arnold Schwarzenegger. Because they are seemingly complete and lack nothing, they do not address demands to the Other, they do not desire (and as such mask the very condition of human subjectivity). Such completeness is, of course, illusory: it exists only in the imaginary unity and mastery of the mirror phase, and therefore depends upon the Other and can be achieved only at the cost of division and lack. The corollary of narcissism is thus aggression, either against any otherness that comes between the subject and his desired image of unity, or against the Other as affording unity at the cost of division. It is no accident therefore that films centred on such figures are replete with violence.

At stake there is always a relation to the Other: violence is precisely a way of dealing with the lack in the Other, but the relation to the Other varies, as the following examples will indicate. One kind of violence seeks to complete the Other by extirpating the villain who is the obstacle to social harmony. It typically occurs in those movies where a murderous psychopath is on the rampage, necessitating the cop – who usually has a history of failed relationships or is flawed in some other way – going out onto the streets after him. The implication is that were it not for the villain all would be well socially and sexually; by eliminating him the hero would be fulfilled and society restored to harmony. Thus the villain

functions to hide the impossibility of such a state of affairs he masks the lack in the Other

Another kind of violence, typically that directed against women, occurs as the corollary of identification with the Other. Here the Other is portrayed as lacking, no sexual relation is possible. But, instead of accepting this inescapable condition of subjectivity, men have traditionally situated this lack in women rather than in language. In so doing lack is transformed into women's deficiency – and hence in many films women as the embodiment of lack are threatened, attacked and killed. As in Freud's account of the fantasy 'a child is being beaten', the subject moves from the position of beaten (by the signifier that divides him) to beater (of women), and thereby becomes, though only in the imaginary, the Other. The muted verbal violence of Rhett's 'Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn' at the end of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) mistakenly involves the fantasy that he can be done with the lack and the desire that in Hollywood is figured by women.

A third strategy involving violence attempts not to fill the hole in the Other but to abolish the Other altogether – and hence be free of the signifying chain, of desire, of the burden of existence. It can take a number of forms. One is the murder of the counterpart, which in different contexts can be either the ideal image of the mirror phase or the lost object. What these very different counterparts have in common is that the subject exists only by virtue of being separated from them. By directing violence at the counterpart the aim is to end that separation; but since the subject cannot exist without separation, such violence is suicidal. When at the end of Peckinpah's film *Pat Garrett shoots Billy* he is actually destroying himself, which the film subsequently makes explicit by having him turn and shoot his own image in the mirror. Another variant is the destruction of the Other as that which refuses to recognize you as you wish to be recognized. *The Long Goodbye* (1973) ends with Terry Lennox saying 'You always were a loser, Marlowe'; to which Marlowe responds by shooting him. Finally there is the destruction of the Other because it permits the subject no more than lack and desire. Weary of the empty promises of plenitude, the subject wants to abolish the Other so as to begin again. This is what occurs at the end of *The Wild Bunch* (1969) when Pike Bishop chooses death in preference to an existence that has become intolerable. His attack on the Mexicans is an attack on the castrating Other, but the end of lack and the end of desire is the death of the subject. (We return to the topic of the death wish, which this invokes, later in the paper.) In all of these instances, it is no accident that the violence occurs at the end of the film. For the subject depends upon the Other, and without it ceases to exist. While resolution occurs, it is at the cost of closing down rather than opening up the future.

The second category of figures masking the lack in the Other are those idealized figures who make good the lack in the protagonists. Although there are many Hollywood films where the idealized figure is a male making good the lack in the woman's life – for instance, Kris Kristofferson in *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974), or Alan Bates in *An Unmarried Woman* (1977) (films that were purportedly feminist in their allegiance) – more typically the idealized figure is a woman. Indeed the recurrence in countless films of women representing the current ideal of beauty has been a major concern of recent film theory.

Following Mulvey (who, though never using the concept of *la femme*, pointed to the idealization of women) and other commentators, we would suggest that these supposedly perfect beings are so many versions of *la femme*, the nonexistent figuration of the *objet a*, that by concealing castration can within the male fantasy make good the lack. It is because of this that Lacan could say that a beautiful woman is a perfect incarnation of man's castration¹⁸ and that beauty is 'a barrier so extreme as to forbid access to a fundamental horror'¹⁹ From the countless instances of the attempt to figure *la femme*, we will cite just four, together with independent critical comment. Thus, Greta Garbo in *Camille* (1936), the woman of mystery, of whom Serge André commented that 'the enigma of woman functions as a fog covering the absence of sexual rapport';²⁰ Tippi Hedren in *Marnie* (1963) (at least in the opening sequence of the film), who as Raymond Bellour has pointed out,²¹ is established in a relay of looks of the male gaze, and as such is a signifier without a referent in that, according to Zdenko Vrdlouec, 'her only link with reality is fantasy';²² Kim Novak as Madeleine in *Vertigo* (1958), a film that more than any other perhaps, is concerned with the fundamental absence and impossibility of *la femme*; Faye Dunaway as Evelyn Mulwray in *Chinatown* (1974), whose fall from the position of elusive mystery in the early part of the film, like Madeleine's in *Vertigo*, makes her into the reject, *le dechet*, already dead when she dies. Behind the masquerade there is nothing; all these beautiful women are simulacra.

Our analysis, like others before it, implies that in Hollywood women appear largely on the terms dictated by male fantasy: those women deemed beautiful function to mask the lack in the Other and support the illusion of sexual rapport, while those considered unattractive become the objects of the male aggression resulting from disappointment at the lack in the Other. This is not to say that female stars function only as objects for the male gaze – spectators' relation to fantasy is more complex than that. Male and female spectators do not identify with characters as such or simply in terms of their respective genders, rather they identify with figures in

¹⁸ Quoted in Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso 1989), p. 172

¹⁹ Lacan 'Kant avec Sade', p. 63

²⁰ Serge André *Que Veut une Femme* (Paris: Navarin 1986) p. 200

²¹ Raymond Bellour, 'Hitchcock the enunciator', *Camera Obscura* no. 2 (1977) pp. 69–91

²² Zdenko Vrdlouec, 'Pas de printemps pour Marnie' in Slavoj Žižek (ed.) *Tous de que vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur Lacan sans jamais oser le demander à Hitchcock* (Paris: Navarin, 1988), p. 210

particular fantasy scenarios. For instance, spectators identify with Robocop not because they wish to be automata but because of his effective way of dealing with troublesome people. Similarly an actress figuring *la femme* can also be a point of identification for both female and male spectators. When Vivien in *Pretty Woman* passes through the hotel lobby past the admiring hotel staff on the way to the opera, she is at once the object of the voyeuristic gaze (itself by no means limited to male spectators) and a point of identification for spectators of both sexes in that in the fantasy scenario she is looked at from the position she would like to be looked at from, and thus overcomes castration. For being a subject, to recall the mirror phase, involves being seen, and that in terms which are given by the Other; and one desires to be seen by the Other as one sees oneself in one's narcissism; one wishes to be recognized by the Other, or rather, misrecognized (since the mirror identification with one's image is misrecognition). When characters in a film (or for that matter in reality) ask to be loved for themselves they mean for the ideal they narcissistically take themselves to be. Being so seen never occurs except in the imaginary, which points precisely to the source of the pleasure of scenes such as the one we have referred to from *Pretty Woman*: in the imaginary of the text Vivien, with whom the spectator identifies, is seen in terms of her narcissistic ideal.

We thus follow a number of writers, among them David Rodowick, Elizabeth Cowie, and Cora Kaplan²³ in arguing that identification in cinema is multiple and dispersed, with both sexes identifying across gender boundaries. In the present context we would propose further that the dispersed identification with both partners of the couple is, by avoiding sexual difference, a way of also avoiding taking up a position from which sexual rapport is impossible. More speculatively we would suggest too that there might in some instances be a hysterical dimension to such identifications. According to classical psychoanalytic theory the hysteric is a woman asking what it is to be a woman; or, more precisely, and given the determination of female roles by male-dominated society, what it is to be a woman for a man. Hysteria then may be seen as a questioning of and protest against the positions assigned to the female subject, its way of doing so is precisely through a relay of cross-gender identifications, which in turn characterizes the identificatory behaviour of the spectator.

Rapport deferred

Out of a sample of one hundred Hollywood films David Bordwell discovered that ninety-five of these contained a romantic element and that in no fewer than eighty-five romance was the principal line

²³ David Rodowick 'The difficulty of difference', *Wide Angle*, vol. 5 no. 1, pp. 4-15
Elizabeth Cowie 'Fantasia M/F', no. 9 (1984) pp. 70-105
Cora Kaplan, 'The Thorn Birds fiction: fantasy, femininity', in *Sea Changes* (London: Verso 1986)

24 David Bordwell Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1985) p. 16

of action, figures that confirm the rule of thumb that a 'love interest' is good box office.²⁴ In film after film a heterosexual couple is united in perfect rapport, thereby implying that far from there being a lack in the Other, it on the contrary contains both a signifier that will finally name the subject and the *objet a*, hence the possibility of *jouissance*. But as obvious as this promise of sexual rapport is the fact that very little of such films' running time is given over to the depiction of it. Instead romantic narratives are almost invariably concerned with the obstacles in the way of its realization. The question then is, why if what is wanted is sexual relation should films not celebrate it rather than concern themselves with problems preventing it occurring? Why in *Pretty Woman* do Edward and Vivien not simply unproblematically fall in love and spend the remainder of the film in a state of bliss? Why in so many films does an initial erotic encounter precipitate a crisis that is only resolved at the end of the film, if at all? Why should films swerve away from what is desired at the very point when satisfaction could be given?

25 Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) pp. 53–4

By way of answers to these questions we would point to a number of possible lines of research. A first step towards an explanation could lie in the concept of the dialectic of the subject, which we have outlined elsewhere.²⁵ A central debate during the 1970s and early 1980s turned on the question of the relation of the spectator to the text. On the one hand a structuralist approach (particularly associated with *Screen*) proposed that the text itself determined the way in which it was read and thus constituted the spectator, on the other hand ethnographic criticism stressed the constitutive role of the spectator, pointing to the empirical evidence of varied responses among spectators to the same text. Those emphasizing the constitutive role of the text saw texts as essentially the same for all spectators, while those emphasizing the constitutive role of the spectator saw them as essentially different. Against this polarity we argued that the relation between text and subject is better comprehended as a dialectic. On the one hand the spectator constitutes the text, augmenting his or her competence in reading (shared by other members of the interpretive community) with a unique set of associations, memories or points of fascination (in this sense no two spectators see the same film). On the other hand the spectator is constituted by the text, in that its shared meaning and in particular the affective states deriving from an understanding of that meaning are determined by its narrative and other structures and would not otherwise exist for the spectator. The dialectic is analogous to that between a lover and the love object, in which the lover simultaneously constitutes the object through overvaluation and projection of fantasy and is constituted in that the affective state is dependent upon the existence of the particular individual who is the love object. Here, as in relation to the text, the subject is both transforming and transformed.

All this concerns the question of sexual relation in that cinema does not simply provide fantasies to satisfy spectators' already existing desires – though it can do so, with spectators extracting episodes from films and integrating them into their own personal fantasy scenarios. Also and more importantly cinema promises to answer the desire it constitutes through the scenarios it enacts. Before entering the cinema the spectator does not care whether or not ET calls home, or the towering inferno is extinguished, or Roger Thornhill clears his name, or Vivien remains a prostitute. But in the course of constituting the text the spectator is in turn constituted by it, and comes to care. Desire, in the cinema as elsewhere is the desire of the Other; the obstacles and delays of the Other of the text produce a lack that in turn gives rise to a desire. And equally the text produces the imaginary objects that will satisfy this desire.

It is here, we would argue, that the power and success of cinema lies. In everyday reality there is, in Lacan's terms, always a failed dialectic, in which the encounter with the Other produces not a unified but a divided subject. Demand can only find expression through signifiers within the signifying system of the Other, but because the signifier that would adequately represent the subject's wish does not exist there is always something left to desire. In the cinema, however, there are times (perhaps infrequently) when it seems that there is nothing left to desire, when everything demanded of the text seems to have been gratified. That this can be so is because the text itself has determined the nature of that demand in such a way that the desires that emerge can apparently be satisfied. In returning time and again to the cinema in the expectation of pleasure, spectators are not so much seeking to possess a lost object as to become the subjects who in the imaginary of the text can possess the lost object it constructs. Just as in the Hollywood romance the couple seem made for one another, so too the film and the spectator.

Therefore, to return to the questions we have posed, a first reason for the difficulties in the way of romantic fulfilment is that this is a means of evoking desire. A second reason is that they keep the object at a distance. On the one hand the exchange between spectator and film produces a subject who lacks and hence desires, and on the other hand objects that will apparently satisfy those desires. But it does so in specific ways. In the case of romance the constitution of the subject typically takes the form of an identification with a character who is lacking – Scarlett (Vivien Leigh) in *Gone with the Wind* seeking fulfilment, Bronte (Andie MacDowell) in *Green Card* (1990) whose passion for her garden is a metaphor for her putting order before life. Spectators identify not solely with idealized figures, but with those who lack, and they do so in order to have fantasy organize desire. At the same time an object is constituted, Rhett for Scarlett, Georges for Bronte, that will

apparently make good the lack. But as we have already shown, such an object exists in the real, as the cause of desire (in that separation from it produces a lack), and in the imaginary, as the lure promising to make good the lack, but it crucially does not exist within the symbolic (for if it did the subject would cease to be a subject). The form it takes within the imaginary masks a void, and fantasies are constructions which function to hide this void behind what seems to be *objet a*. As in courtly love on Lacan's reading, narrative functions to maintain a distance, lending enchantment to the object, guarding against exposure of the void behind it. Through the narrative economy of the text any object can be made to appear to be the *objet a*, any woman *la femme*, so long as they are not approached too closely.

The presence of obstacles can therefore be explained as a means of both making the object desirable and of preventing its exposure as nothing. Just as in courtly love where the barrier permits the lover to believe in sexual relation, so fantasy in film (as elsewhere) engenders representations of the ultimately unrepresentable object in order to screen off the real of castration, *la chose* and the experience of lack.

This can be also described, appositely, in optical terms, through the concept of anamorphosis invoked by Lacan in his discussion of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors*. In the foreground of the painting there is a mark or patch that viewed frontally on is impossible to decipher; only when seen from a foreshortening sideways perspective does this reveal itself to be a skull. Narrative has a similarly anamorphic function, in that the obstacles constituting it place the object in a particular perspective that renders it desirable. The positions occupied by the spectator through identifications determine what can be perceived and desired: by identifying with Fred Astaire in *Top Hat* (1935) the spectator finds Ginger Rogers desirable, with Celia Johnson in *Brief Encounter* (1945), Trevor Howard. All these are signifiers, whose desirability derives only from the point of view of another signifier, by identifying with one signifier the spectator finds another signifier desirable. In practice, of course, as we have already explained, the spectator's identifications are multiple and fractured, they are not limited to any one character on screen. As in Freud's analysis of the fantasy 'a child is being beaten', the spectator is able to switch identifications in the course of a narrative. For example, when the spectator identifies with Edward in *Pretty Woman*, Vivien, onwards from the moment in the film when romantic music first occurs and he sees her asleep, is *la femme*. But she is not necessarily *la femme* when the spectator identifies with her. At times she is – as when she is seen as she would wish to be seen; while at other times she is lacking, as when during the first shopping expedition she is humiliated by the hostile saleswomen.

At which point we can specify a final reason for the need of obstacles, that is implicit in the preceding passage. It is this: by keeping the object of desire at a distance and masking the lack in the Other, narrative is able to sustain desire rather than, as is generally supposed, to fulfil it. As such, narrative is on the side of desire and opposed to the death drive. For as Alain Juranville has explained, the death drive is the turning against desire itself and 'its partial truth', as a result of the discovery that there is no ultimate satisfaction, that *la chose* does not exist.²⁶ But there is an evident problem here. If narrative is that which lures us forward, desiring that which does not exist, then how is it to be resolved? If sexual rapport means bringing object and subject together, how is the death implicit in this to be avoided? The contradiction may be summarized as that between the impossibility of attaining the real object and the requirement of the myth of sexual rapport that this is effected. Hollywood faces the problem of how to represent what is finally unrepresentable.

Representing the unrepresentable

The most obvious solution is to construct the semblance of sexual relation by showing the couple in perfect harmony, but as we have already indicated such attempts are usually fraught with discomfort for the spectator. Jack Nicholson and Susan Sarandon romping together amidst pink balloons (in *The Witches of Eastwick* [1987]), or Jonathan Switcher (Andrew McCarthy) in *Mannequin* (1987) kissing his 'living doll' atop a mound of teddy bears, are less than utterly convincing as representations of sexual rapport. Nor do metaphors from nature fare much better, still less when as in *Dances with Wolves* (1990) the voice-over narration draws the audience's attention to what is already self-evident, namely the unity of hero and heroine in the idyllic prairie setting. Sometimes, however, such attempts are successful, as arguably in the scene from *Klute* (1971) where Bree Daniels (Jane Fonda) and Klute (Donald Sutherland) walk together through a street market. A number of factors contribute to the success of this scene, among them the aura produced by the couple (possibly an effect of the stars having an affair at the time), the ease and seeming unscriptedness of the occasion, the displacement of the personal onto the social setting of the market and the diegetic presence of the signifier fruit (rather more resonant than balloons or dolls) as a metaphor for desire and sexual pleasure. Above all though, it is the romantic music on the soundtrack that transfigures the everyday activity of shopping.

For Hegel the effect of music is to articulate through the dialectic of conflict and resolution something of the unity that underlies the subject's own thought and consciousness. The effect of the process

that can be discerned beneath the discrete phrases is to transform time from an infinite succession of nows into a unified whole. Just such an experience is afforded romantic music on the soundtrack. But what for Hegel is a process of recognition, from a Lacanian perspective can only be one of misrecognition. For Lacan the dialectic always fails, because in a chain of signifiers $S_1 \dots S_2$ something is always lost, the *objet a* falls out. It is for this reason that Juranville calls time the primordial place of the real. The gap between the signifiers is 'the time of pure suffering', since what is desired does not occur there.²⁷ In this real time S_1 and S_2 emerge only as lures and the gap between them becomes a nothingness where they are abolished. However, romantic music sutures this gap; instead of real time there is the time of the imaginary and what is anticipated arrives. Whereas in the ordinary run of events what occurs is never identical with what is anticipated, both because the image of unity in the mirror is never achieved and because the desired object once attained is found to be lacking, with music nothing appears to be lost between the signifiers. As in Hegel's account the notes seem to relate to a larger process with an underlying unity. Instead of there being 'no whole without a hole' absences exist only to become presence, holes open up only to be filled.²⁸ When Rogers and Astaire dance, when in *Ghost* (1990) Sam (Patrick Swayze) and Molly (Demi Moore) come together for the last time to the strains of *Unchained Melody*, it seems that the harmony extends beyond the music to envelop the couple.

If something is lost in entering the signifying chain, then meaning and being never coincide. Divided by the signifier, the subject can never achieve self-expression and there is always an impossible-to-say. One of the functions of analysis is to bring out the existence of this impossibility and to thereby free the subject from the illusion that he or she can ever be other than divided. With romantic music the impossible-to-say is if not enunciated at any rate rendered present, an effect further accomplished by music's semantic component. But even when there are lyrics the meaning can never fully be captured; its sense is present but cannot be stated. Such presence of the impossible-to-say tames the unconscious, changes it from a threatening otherness to a comforting closeness through which the subject can imagine him or herself to be whole and undivided, the man and the woman proceed in step with the signifier, and meaning and being coincide. (Of course not all music functions in this way. the Lesforts cite Beethoven's *Grosse Fugue* and we would also mention Barraqué's *Piano Sonata* as examples of works where the real as impossible to say is only too evident.)

More usually Hollywood prefers a solution that enables it to avoid having to attempt any explicit representation of sexual rapport, and it does so by adopting a tense other than the present. The three principal options are to say that the sexual relation will exist, that it

²⁷ Ibid., p. 85

²⁸ Jacques-Alain Miller
 'Microscopie: Ornicar?' no. 47
 (1988) p. 57

has existed, or that it would exist but for a particular set of circumstances. In each case the resolution is deferred to an imaginary time outside the text.

Of the three, the solution of setting the sexual relation in the text's future is by far and away the most common, in that this is the standard happy ending in which the lovers come together all set to live happily ever after. Since the time of the imaginary is time anticipated, as when in the mirror phase the child anticipates its future unity, this solution remains wholly within the imaginary, by deferring the need to put the sexual relation to the test of the symbolic. As the credits roll over the terminal kiss, the spectator is screened from the real impossibility of what is proposed. *North By Northwest* (1959) ends like this, and *Pretty Woman*, and hundreds of other films.

Another solution is to set the sexual relation in the past. At the end of *Walkabout* (1970) Jenny Agutter imagines a lost plenitude, but as the film has already shown this never happened, she rejected the aboriginal boy's advances, he killed himself, *la chose* as plenitude does not exist. Hollywood romance, in contrast, has tended to suggest that *la chose* can exist as plenitude. In *Casablanca* (1942), for example, the sexual rapport between Rick (Humphrey Bogart) and Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) is suggested not by the scenes where they are shown together in Paris but in those where they realize that their idyll is lost forever. When Rick says, 'We'll always have Paris', it is not the Paris depicted in the flashbacks but the one retroactively created by the tears in Ilsa's eyes that is the emblem of sexual rapport. A similar retroactive traversal of the text to convert what has just been seen into the overcoming of lack occurs at the end of *Pretty Woman*, when Roy Orbison's title song, repeated over the credits, is able to suggest that the spectator has witnessed something altogether more magical than a red dress, a plane flight to San Francisco and an opera.

The third strategy is to imply that the sexual relation would have existed were it not for the existence of some insurmountable obstacle. The emblematic phrase here is 'if only': if only they had met earlier, if only they had understood each other better; if only she hadn't died. . . . Thus in *Gone with the Wind* the sexual relation is presented as failing through the inability at certain crucial moments of Scarlett and Rhett to express their true emotions, with the result that there is a breakdown in communication between them. In *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1947) a failure to appreciate the depth of the other's feelings until too late ruins the romance. Similarly in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988), Valmont (John Malkovich) discovers too late, when she is already dying, that he really loved Madame de Tourvel (Michelle Pfeiffer) rather than the Marquise de Merteuil (Glenn Close) he spurned her for. Death by itself without the complication of belated self-discovery may also

figure as the obstacle, as in *Love Story* (1970), *Camille*, *Bobby Deerfield* (1977) and, most recently, *Ghost*, where but for the fact that Sam is dead and Molly alive they would form a perfect couple. Perhaps the most striking example is *Dr Zhivago* (1965), in which it is made clear that were it not for the tragedy of Russian history Lara (Julie Christie) and Zhivago (Omar Sharif) would have lived happily ever after. Another type of obstacle consists of character flaws, as in *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), *The Way We Were* (1973), *McCabe and Mrs Miller* (1971) and *Sophie's Choice* (1982), where, because of what happened to her in Auschwitz, Sophie (Meryl Streep) is trapped in a self-destructive relationship and cannot therefore break away into a genuinely fulfilling one. Moral prohibition also can function to keep the lovers apart – for example, *Brief Encounter*, *Someone to Watch Over Me* (1987) and *Now Voyager* (1942). Of course, as we have already indicated, films can combine two or more of these elements: *Reckless Moment* (1944) brings together moral prohibition and death; *Casablanca*, the circumstances of Ilsa's having met Laszlo before Rick and the requirements of duty.

One key 'if only' narrative we have not so far mentioned is that of Oedipus, the obstacle of course being the taboo against incest. During the 1970s a number of critics, among them most notably Raymond Bellour, argued for the centrality of the Oedipus complex as an organizing principle both for the nineteenth-century novel and for narrative cinema. Bellour proposed that American cinema constantly re-enacts and is fundamentally shaped by the kind of subjectivity and its scenarization whose logic was first established by psychoanalysis. A propos of his study of *North by Northwest*, he notes his constant surprise at the extent to which 'everything was organized according to a classic Oedipal scenario'.²⁹ Recent readings of Freud, however, suggest that this confidence in the ur-text of Oedipus is misplaced. Rather than expressing a fundamental reality of desire and the possibility of its fulfilment, that recurs as a consequence across a spectrum of texts, it has been suggested that the Oedipus is itself a way of masking off something that does not exist. Thus Lacan in his Seminar XVII describes the Oedipus as 'a dream of Freud's', a comment that Juranville and Baas have taken to mean that while the castration complex really exists, the presumed Oedipus complex is a myth, a 'symptom' of Freud's.³⁰ According to Juranville desire is not initially Oedipal, but is rather a desire for *la chose*, which as we have already seen, is absent but nonetheless gives rise to the myth of plenitude. In the words of Mireille Ardès, 'Castration is not the effect of the myth, rather the myth is an effect of castration'.³¹ The Oedipus functions to suggest that plenitude is not innately impossible but is merely forbidden: were it not for the law of the father there could be a return to the original satisfaction associated with the mother's body. What it does

²⁹ Raymond Bellour, *Alternation, segmentation, hypnosis* interview with Raymond Bellour by Janet Bergstrom, *Camera Obscura* nos 3–4 (1979) p. 93.

³⁰ Quoted by Juranville, *Lacan et la Philosophie*, p. 199.

³¹ Ardès, *Lacan et la Question du Métalangage*, p. 61.

is erroneously substitute paternal interdiction for the castration that is the inevitable consequence of the signifier. Hence Oedipus is a neurotic perspective on castration, a flight from the desire to which castration gives rise. The mother mistakenly comes to occupy the place of *la chose* and is desirable only because of the attribution to her of *objet a*, the trace of *la chose*. Oedipus is a way of dissimulating the absence of *la chose* and of repressing castration.

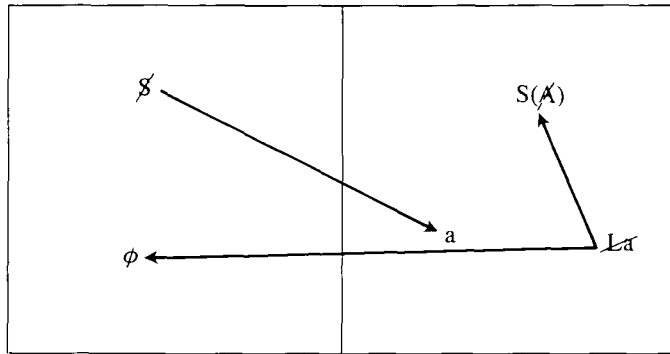
On this reading, such obviously Oedipal dramas as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1981), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *Shane* (1952) and *Body Heat* (1981), serve to mask the impossibility of absolute *jouissance*. Thus when Shane (Alan Ladd) rides out of the valley at the end of the film there is no implication that absolute *jouissance* is impossible, rather the spectator is left with the fantasy that it is merely prohibited. Because Marion (Jean Arthur) is already married and they are both too honest to transgress the law, Shane has to settle for her handshake and renounce the *jouissance* that could otherwise have been his. Although *Body Heat* has been characterized by Frederic Jameson as a postmodern text, by reason of its supposed depthlessness and evacuation of affect, it can more convincingly be seen as a traditional Oedipal drama. The fact that Ned (William Hurt) does not achieve the sexual rapport he seeks nevertheless leads the audience to believe in principle that it exists, since Matty (Kathleen Turner) in remaining a mystery to the end represents *la femme*, terminus of male desire. Here as in other examples we have discussed, the allocation of *jouissance* to a hypothetical beyond of the text enables *la chose* as the irreducible absence of plenitude to remain undisclosed.

During the 1970s the emphasis within film theory shifted from the texts themselves to the exchange between texts and spectators and to the meanings thereby produced. Studies such as those by Baudry and Metz on the effect of the apparatus on the spectator and by Heath on the suturing effects of certain narrative procedures typified the new approach. Despite subsequent criticism of many aspects of such thinking, the central thesis in our opinion still remains valid, to the effect that in reading a text the subject is taken up and changed, and that such reconstitution permits meanings to become available that would not otherwise exist. Such we would argue is the case with romance. The subject is taken up by the narrative and other textual strategies of the genre and is placed at the appropriate distance so that the mirage of sexual rapport can be sustained.

The politics of romance

Our initial assumption in thinking about romance was that the politics of it were unproblematic: it seemed a straightforward instance of a discursive regime producing both a characteristic mode

of subjectivity – the assignation of roles – and a domain of objects – one reality constituted at the expense of others, and so instituting relations of power. As a discourse produced within and bearing the marks of male dominated culture, and typically ‘authored’ by men, romance would be acted out differently by male and female spectators. Our intention was to write a preliminary outline sketch of the issues, while leaving to one side mutations within the genre during its history and the varying relationships of different audiences to it over time. What seemed clear was that the roles assigned in spectating would be shaped by its authorial dominance by men and that historically these roles were those indicated by the lower portion of Lacan’s formulas of sexuation



While men (♂) relate directly to the cause of desire (a) and seek ways of fulfilling it by developing such stratagems as courtly love, women (La) are forced to seek fulfilment from a position assigned by men, relating firstly to the phallus (φ) men claim to have but in fact do not and secondly to S(A) which is at once the lack in the Other and the putative site of another mode of jouissance. That is to say, men relate to the lost object and seek to overcome its loss by imagining certain women to incarnate it, whereas women have to desire within a situation where men demand they play out particular roles. The political implications of this asymmetry are that women have to pretend they are something they are not (or indeed anyone ever could be) on the masquerade of *la femme*. It is not so much that male fantasy wilfully misrepresents women as that it uses women as a metaphor for what does not exist.

Thus we saw much in Hollywood romance that is reminiscent of Lacan’s ‘... I love something in you that exceeds you ... I mutilate you’, since the other side of idealization is the violence implicit in being called upon to be what no social being could ever be.³² As a historically specific signifying economy within patriarchy, romance seemed to be a further example of socially instituted gender

³² Quoted in L. Casenave: ‘Un fils naturel’ in *Traits de Perversion dans les Structures Cliniques* (Paris: Navarin, 1990) p. 96

asymmetry. On this basis we interpreted the pleasure women experience from the genre as a function of their position within patriarchy. In watching *Pretty Woman* we hypothesized that the fantasy is that being what men demand will require no sacrifice on the part of the woman: like a latter-day Cinderella, Vivien is transformed into a princess, learning how to dress and behave in a way that commands universal admiration, while at the same time this entry into the symbolic makes apparent to everybody what she was all along, a wonderful person. In a sense, therefore, she is not transformed at all, unlike Edward who is transformed through his meeting her (and shows it by taking his shoes off in the park). As a human being she lacked nothing, the problem being with society that failed to appreciate her. Edward in his role of fairy godmother puts this to rights with his credit card, she in turn is then able to put Edward, as the representative of the society that saw her only as a prostitute, to rights with her innate decency. The episode described earlier where she is admired in her new dress is emblematic of the film's fantasy; her beauty is now manifest and she is thereby empowered to change Edward into someone with whom sexual rapport is possible. Thus castration is denied; in entering the symbolic she is not subjected to the gaze of the Other which is the ruin of all dreams of mastery, but is rather confirmed by it in being seen as she would wish to be seen. On this account, then, the fantasy that makes *Pretty Woman* (and other films within the genre) attractive to women is that it is possible both to be what patriarchal cultures demand without sacrifice and to transform men into beings with whom sexual rapport is possible.

However, the intense pleasure many women have experienced from this and similar films raises questions both of the adequacy of the above account and of the validity of the psychoanalysis on which it is based. It would seem that this enjoyment of romance is something that men by and large do not share. Cora Kaplan's comment that no man of her acquaintance had read *Gone with the Wind* except for professional reasons³³ tallies with the relative lack of pleasure most men appear to have experienced from *Pretty Woman* (whose structure is very close to the standard Mills and Boon formula as described by Ann Rosalind Jones³⁴). The question then would be: what is it about romance that engages women? What do they get out of it, and what do they put into it?

One possible answer would be that the fantasy of sexual rapport is an opiate, a way of making more endurable not only unsatisfactory relations with men but a whole panoply of subordinate social relations. As well as attempting to make good the lack in the Other, romance would thus be a compensatory fantasy for the relative absence of power in the social roles women are assigned. But as Tania Modleski suggests in her analysis of the American Harlequin series, this fantasy can 'induce' or 'intensify' women's problems,

³³ Kaplan, 'The Thorn Birds' fiction fantasy femininity p. 120

³⁴ Ann Rosalind Jones 'Mills and Boon meet feminism' in Jean Radford (ed.) *The Progress of Romance* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986)

³⁵ Tania Modleski *Loving with a Vengeance*, (London Methuen, 1982), p. 57

³⁶ Richard Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', in Rick Altman (ed.), *Genre: The Musical: A Reader* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1981)

³⁷ Janice A. Radway *Reading the Romance* (London: Verso 1987) p. 210

³⁸ Modleski *Loving with a Vengeance* p. 112

³⁹ Lacan 'L'etourdit p. 6

⁴⁰ For a discussion of this concept see Jacques-Alain Miller 'Les réponses du réel', in Navarin editeur *Aspects du Malaise dans la Civilisation* (Paris: Navarin 1987)

just as 'certain tranquillisers taken to relieve anxiety are, though temporarily helpful, ultimately anxiety producing'.³⁵ An alternative is to see romance as a way of negotiating (for Jones) or resolving (for Modleski) the problems faced by women by displacing them into the single one of finding sexual rapport. Another answer proposed by Modleski, drawing upon the work of Richard Dyer, is that romance is as much a challenge to as endorsement of the feminine condition.³⁶ Her emphasis here is upon the utopian dimension to romance, expressive of women's desire for community, transcendence, autonomy and honest sexual relations. In elaborating these various explanations of romance most commentators have agreed that it combines contradictory elements. Janice Radway, for example, argues that the oppositional (because non-self-denying) act of reading romance is at odds with the patriarchal ideology embodied within it,³⁷ and Tania Modleski that, behind its seemingly innocuous escapism, romance 'simultaneously challenges and reaffirms traditional values, behaviour and attitudes'.³⁸

In the light of which, the politics of romance are rather more difficult to determine than we assumed. One line of research as an alternative to psychoanalysis would be through an ethnographic approach, such as that adopted by Radway, where the emphasis is placed upon the responses of actual readers to particular texts. Such an approach suffers, however, from certain limitations, the most obvious of which is that (if psychoanalysis has any validity) readers can never know all that is feeding into their responses: there is always an unconscious. This is perhaps most evident in relation to symptoms: in Freud's classic case study, the Rat Man, the recounting of the rat torture that occasioned the patient so much distress was accompanied by signs of extreme pleasure. If, in other words, the symptom delivers *jouissance*, so arguably does art too. The formula for fantasy $\$ \diamond a$ involves both the barred subject, that is never transparent to itself, and the *objet a*, which though unrepresentable is the very condition of the fantasy's functioning, since its absence provides the framework where alone the fantasy can appear. If the dialectic of the subject means anything, it is that the subject is present as, in Lacan's phrase, the response of the real; and the real can never be imaged or symbolized. Fantasy functions to bring together subject and object in a *jouissance* that eludes conscious thought, both the subject's implication and the object's operation are beyond reach. But if, because of this, ethnographic criticism can never pronounce a final word, neither can psychoanalysis. It too has its limitations; and worse, it has a tendency to forget them.

In saying 'there is no metalanguage'³⁹ psychoanalysis recognizes that because variously of the existence of the unconscious, the particularity of each analysand, and the temporality of truth, it too can never pronounce a final word.⁴⁰ But equally the statement

makes it clear that recourse to a metalanguage is unavoidable, since it is itself metalinguistic; and the practice of psychoanalysis (like other social practices) requires that it do so – even terminating the analytic session involves the analyst in an interpretation of some kind. But the risk is that such necessary local intervention becomes a totalizing discourse, reducing all other discourses to the status of object languages whose truth it knows. Yet on its own account psychoanalysis has no claim to any such status.

We conclude, therefore, on a note of caution concerning psychoanalysis, all the more so since from its beginnings it has been incapable of providing a convincing account of female subjectivity. Psychoanalysis for the moment may be seen as exemplifying what Jean-François Lyotard calls the 'differend', where 'something which ought to be able to be phrased cannot yet be phrased'.⁴¹ In such a situation there can be no question of assigning psychoanalysis a privileged or, worse, monopolistic position in relation to discussions of femininity and romance. Different discourses must be allowed to develop in all their possible incommensurability; psychoanalysis must never become a totalizing theory, silencing that which is other to it. In conclusion, then, we would register our concurrence with Lyotard's call, in his paper 'What is postmodernism?', for discursive heterogeneity: 'Let us wage war on totality, let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable, let us activate the difference and save the honour of the name.'⁴²

⁴¹ Jean-François Lyotard *The Differend* trans G van der Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1983) p. 13

⁴² Jean-François Lyotard 'What is postmodernism?', trans G Bennington and B Massumi, in *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984) p. 82

France 1945–65 and Hollywood: the *policier* as inter-national text

GINETTE VINCENTEAU

Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville* (1965) is as good a starting point as any for talking about the relationship between French cinema in the 1950s and 1960s and Hollywood. It is a French film made in two eminently American genres: the thriller and science fiction. Its star, Eddie Constantine, is American, while its director, Jean-Luc Godard, is the most famous 'French' director outside France (he is actually Swiss). By 1965 the New Wave was no longer that new, but *Alphaville* is, with Godard's *A Bout de souffle*, Truffaut's *Les 400 coups*, and Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (all 1959), one of the most exported products of that most exportable French film movement. As such, the New Wave and Godard are well-ploughed critical terrains. Moreover, Godard's work has been thoroughly analysed in terms of its quotations and borrowings from American cinema, and many have cogently explicated the place of Hollywood in the critical apparatus of the New Wave, in particular the *politique des auteurs*. It has become almost a cliché to state that the New Wave 'would not have existed without the American B movie'.¹ Like all clichés, this is partly true. But there would have been no New Wave either without the mainstream French cinema, the 'tradition of quality' so despised by New Wave critics and pretty much everybody else after them. Similarly, the French *policier*, usually deemed to be a pale copy of the Hollywood thriller, draws on indigenous traditions. On the other hand, the mainstream French cinema itself belonged to an international network dominated by Hollywood, and engaged with American cinema in industrial and aesthetic terms, in ways that have tended to be obscured by

¹ As someone did at a recent BFI conference: *Europe and Identity*, NFT, 7 June 1991.



American culture in French version: Eddie Constantine reads *The Big Sleep* in French in *Alphaville* (courtesy of Robar Droits Audiovisuels; all stills in this article are also courtesy of the B.F.I. stills archive.)

- 2 See *Hollywood & Retour*, *Cinéma sous influences*, April 1986.
- 3 See Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment: America in the World Film Market 1907-1934* (London: British Film Institute, 1985).
- 4 Sources: *La Cinématographie française*, *Bulletins d'information du CNC*, *Le Film français* and *L'Annuaire du Cinéma*.

dominant film history, following the New Wave rhetoric.

This paper traces the general pattern of the relationship between France and Hollywood in the period 1945-65 (with attention to both the New Wave and mainstream French cinema), and looks at how the French thriller (including *Alphaville*) inscribes the ambivalent rapport between French and US cultures.

France-Hollywood: a 'two-way fascination and one-way exploitation'?

From the time of World War 1 when French films lost their world supremacy and American cinema established its hegemony,³ cries of 'invasion' have been prominent in French discourses about the relationship between France and Hollywood, paralleled by the various state and trade attempts at curbing the number of American pictures on French screens. Mostly in vain. The figures are telling:

Feature films shown on the French market 1925-65⁴

Year	Total numbers	French	American	Others
1925	684	73	557	54
1927	580	82	368	130
1929	437	52	211	174
1931	453	139	220	94
1935	466	115	248	103
1937	424	111	230	83
1947-9	1008	226	561	221
1950	403	111	204	88
1954	438	97	199	142
1956	388	126	162	100
1959	377	132	124	121
1961	367	158	99	110
1962	379	142	48	189
1965	389	134	113	142

(1938-9 — figures not complete; 1940-6 — not applicable.)

In this long-running saga, I would isolate a few key moments: 1914-18: the Americans step into the gap left by a French industry weakened by the war, while strengthening their presence on French soil through distribution companies. This terminates the 'golden age' of French cinema as a world-significant film industry, when seventy to eighty per cent of its revenue came from exports. 1928: Edouard Herriot, minister for education and fine arts, issues sets of regulations to curb American imports (for four American

films imported into France, one French film has to be exported to the USA) The MPPDA's (Motion Pictures and Distributors of America) response is to despatch Will Hays to Paris and enforce an amendment, the rate is changed to one to seven

1929–30: the coming of sound to France. The American presence decreases quantitatively, supporting the thesis that the coming of sound gave European film industries a boost because of the language barrier, but increases 'qualitatively' precisely because of language Throughout the 1930s, various trade agreements try to limit the import of American movies, with little effect. Major American studios establish or strengthen their presence in production and distribution most notoriously, Paramount runs, from 1929 to 1932, a multi-language production unit at Joinville, a suburb of Paris, where films are shot in as many as fourteen versions; the studio is variously called 'Hollywood-on-Seine' or 'Babel-on-Seine'.

After this experiment, the exhibition practices for non-French language films that we now know are settled American films are released either in subtitled or dubbed form, or both simultaneously Subtitled versions are shown in art houses (*salles d'art et essai*) and prestige first-run cinemas (*salles d'exclusivité*, for example on the Champs Elysées in Paris), dubbed ones in local cinemas or *exclusivité* cinemas in more 'popular' areas (for example on the Grands Boulevards) – French television channels reproduce this division. Two simple facts, often overlooked in Britain, are that American films in France and most of continental Europe are *audibly* much more 'foreign', and that subtitles do not always connote 'art cinema'

1930: Novelist Georges Duhamel, in a best-selling book entitled *Scènes de la vie future*, indicts American cinema as one of the main culprits in what he perceives to be the mounting 'Americanization' of France A few years later, in 1933, Georges Bonnet, minister for trade, swaps the almost unlimited import of American films for the export of French fine wines (this being the end of prohibition), to the fury of other trade and government interested parties. Around 1935, Paris becomes the intellectual headquarter of jazz criticism, with Hugh Panassié's book *Le Jazz hot* and the launch of the magazine *Jazz hot*

1940–5. American films are banned by the Vichy government, and the Ministry for Education subsidizes a film demonstrating the corrupting effects of American movies on French youth. As part of its programme for a return to 'French' values, Vichy also wages campaigns against jazz – in retaliation, rebellious youths call themselves 'les swing'

1947 Marcel Duhamel creates the *Série noire*, a hugely successful thrillers imprint at Gallimard The *Série noire* brings out translations of American hard-boiled detective writers as well as a number of French novels sometimes written under American pseudonyms



A French icon for the 1930s:
Maurice Chevalier in *Love Me Tonight*.



A French icon for the 1990s:
Gérard Depardieu in *Green Card*.

⁵ For a thorough record of the French presence in Hollywood, see Dominique Lebrun (ed.), *Paris-Hollywood, les Français dans le cinéma américain* (Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1987).

⁶ See Thomas H. Guback, 'Hollywood's international market' in Tino Balio (ed.), *The American Film Industry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

1946–8: The Blum-Byrnes agreements, a commercial treaty between the French and the American governments (signed in 1946 and amended in 1948), fix a minimum quota of French films to be shown on French screens against non-French (and predominantly American) films; it is traditionally interpreted as the French film industry selling out, yet again, to the Americans.

1981: Almost fifty years after Duhamel, Jack Lang (Socialist minister for culture) launches a virulent polemic against 'American cultural imperialism' and boycotts the American film festival in Deauville. Though it attracts a lot of media attention, the polemic falls flat. Lang is countered by French intellectuals on several grounds: the quality and value of American cinema and the need to distinguish it from 'trash' (such as television soaps); the right of individuals to consume what they like; and even France's own imperialistic film-exhibition practices in French-speaking countries of ex-French colonies such as Algeria.

1991: Euro-Disneyland is built at Marne-la-Vallée, near Paris. By now Lang has done a U-turn on American cinema and pinned the award of 'Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres' on Clint Eastwood's lapel; meanwhile, the debate has shifted to television and fast food, and the threat to the 'purity' of the French language.

I have two immediate comments to make on the above chronology. The first one is that the manifestations of French resistance or hostility to Hollywood cinema have consistently taken place against a background of both popular success and high-brow cultural embracing of American products. The second one is that the chronology is one-way – charting the French reaction to Hollywood – because the reverse, the impact of French cinema on Hollywood has been minimal.⁵ With very few exceptions – Maurice and Jacques Tourneur, Maurice Chevalier, Charles Boyer, Louis Jourdan, Simone Simon in *Cat People* (1942), a couple of René Clair films, Louis Malle, Gérard Depardieu in *Green Card* (1990) – the French impact on Hollywood is a long story of non-events, vanishing contracts, and mediocre performances. Furthermore, whatever the strengths and weaknesses of French films themselves, French cinema's exports to the USA have been severely curtailed by ruthless distribution practices,⁶ including the remaking of successful French movies, simultaneously blocking the general release of the original ones – from, in the 1930s and 1940s, *Algiers* (a remake of *Pépé-le-Moko*), *The Long Night* (*Le Jour se lève*), *Human Desire* (*La Bête humaine*), *Scarlet Street* (*La Chienne*), to, more recently, *Three Men and a Cradle* (*Trois hommes et un couffin*); the remake of *A Bout de souffle* (1959) as *Breathless* (1983) was a different matter as a long time elapsed between the two versions. A recent survey put the American audience for *all* subtitled films at less than 2.5 per



The original *Pépé* is arrested:
Jean Gabin (right) in
Pépé-le-Moko.



Pépé's arrest in the remake of
Pépé-le-Moko: Charles Boyer
as *Pépé* (centre) in *Algiers*.

7 Quoted in Jean-Louis Gimbire, 'Made in France', *Première*, no. 166 (1991), p. 118.

8 Theodore Zeldin, 'Foreword', in Denis Lacorne, Jacques Rupnik and Marie-France Toinet (eds), *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism* (London, Macmillan, 1990), pp. x-xi.

9 Michel Winock, 'The Cold War' in *ibid.*, p. 74.

cent of regular film-goers.⁷ In a more general cultural sense, as Theodore Zeldin put it brutally, 'the basic problem has been that the French fascination with the USA has not been reciprocated. There is probably no western country, proportionately to its size, in which the French language is less spoken or less appreciated than the USA.'⁸ The already pessimistic assessment of the Franco-American relationship quoted above may then be rephrased as a one-way fascination and a one-way exploitation. This, in turn, is an over-simplification which the rest of the paper will try to open up.

The French government's decision to house Euro-Disneyland near Paris, together with the debates and fears surrounding its presence and imminent opening, are typical of the profound ambivalence of Franco-American relations in general. Waves of popular enthusiasm – for President Wilson at the end of World War I, for GIs in 1944, the incredible 'Reaganomania' of 1984 – have been regularly followed by waves of hostility – 'US Go Home!' was painted all over French walls throughout the 1940s and 1950s. At the same time, popular love of American products – such as films – has easily coexisted with elitist indictments (Duhamel, Lang) and hostile government policies. Polls conducted between 1952 and 1957, at a time of official anti-Americanism, showed that the image of the USA was positive among the French working classes, including Communist Party voters.⁹ French intellectuals themselves – from Tocqueville to Baudelaire, to Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, and recently Jean Baudrillard – have been deeply divided. Like many of their contemporaries, Beauvoir and Sartre were fiercely pro-Soviet and anti-American, as Beauvoir recorded in her novel *The Mandarins* (1954), and Sartre famously called America a 'mad dog' – while championing American films, novels, and music. Before the canonization of Hollywood directors by the *Cahiers du cinéma* group, Sartre and other writers applied a similar treatment to Faulkner, Steinbeck, and Caldwell, giving them greater cultural respectability than they enjoyed in the USA at the time. It helped, of course, in the 1950s, that it was the McCarthy era and that racism against blacks in the USA was at its most visible. France, supported by its left-wing intellectuals, could play its self-appointed role of *terre d'accueil* (the welcoming land) to the likes of Charlie Parker, Sidney Bechet and Bud Powell (and to Jules Dassin and John Berry, two directors we will come across later in this paper) while being itself engaged in ruthless colonial wars largely financed by the USA. Like the rest of Western Europe, France in the post-World War 2 period became economically dependent on the USA, but, because of the presence of the Communist party in the government until 1947, and subsequently because of its considerable political force, it was also trying to strike a neutralist position between the 'big two' throughout the Cold War. Apart from the most bigoted card-carrying Communist Party members, however, French elites and

popular audiences enthusiastically embraced American cultural forms – jazz, comics, detective fiction and the cinema – most of them in fact already part of French culture since the 1920s, along with the newly available consumer goods: Frigidaires, Coca-Cola, the *Readers' Digest* and blue jeans – the 'bloudjinnzes' desperately wanted by Zazie, the heroine of Raymond Queneau's seminal novel *Zazie dans le métro* (1959). After decades of rural 'backwardness' (or bliss, depending on one's point of view), France belatedly experienced urbanization. Though the move from country to city had begun decades before, the 1950s were the peak of the so-called rural exodus. Because of this time-gap, modernity was seen as quintessentially American, and associated with consumer goods, the 'things' dissected in another key novel of the period, Georges Perec's *Les Choses* (1965), as well as in Godard's films of the early 1960s: *Une Femme mariée* (1964), *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1966), and *Alphaville*.

French modernity also needed the new regime of General de Gaulle's Fifth Republic (1958), a *tabula rasa* of the outdated and unstable values and institutions of the Fourth Republic. Its ensemble of political, economic and cultural reforms was designed to give a tremendous boost to France and significantly altered the balance of France's relationship to America. As historian Michael Harrison argues,

de Gaulle's policies and accomplishments under the Fifth Republic actually put an end to endemic, or structural anti-Americanism in France based on a perception of decline and subordination. This is because de Gaulle offered France a successful mixture of reality and myth organized around the concept of independence and based on policies that minimized perceived dependence on the United States.¹⁰

Anticipating the culture industries of the 1980s, de Gaulle also made the momentous decision of creating a ministry for culture with André Malraux as first minister, responsible for the film industry. The films of the 'New Wave' (a journalistic phrase coined by Françoise Giroud at *L'Express*) made by 'young' directors, became the showcase of exportable French culture on the international scene under the de Gaulle/Malraux regime, along with other products of the Parisian intelligentsia (Existentialism, the Nouveau Roman, and soon structuralism) prompting Claude Chabrol to comment, 'we were promoted like a new brand of soap'.¹¹ These cultural commodities connoted a winning package of youth and modernity – the two eminently marketable values in the western world in the 1950s,¹² with a French twist. Truffaut's declaration that

In 1960, to make cinema for us was to imitate D. W. Griffith . . . In those days all directors were young, it's amazing to realize that

10 Michael M. Harrison, 'French Anti-Americanism under the Fourth Republic and the Gaullist solution' in Lacorne et al (eds) *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism*, pp. 169–70.

11 Claude Chabrol in Jean-Luc Douin (ed.), *La Nouvelle vague 25 ans après* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1983).

12 See Dick Hebdige, 'Towards a cartography of taste 1935–1962' in *Hiding in the Light* (London: Routledge, 1988).

Hitch, Chaplin, King Vidor, Walsh, Ford, Capra, all made their first films before they were 25; to be a cineaste was a young man's job, and that must remain so.¹³

13 François Truffaut in Douin (ed.), *La Nouvelle vague 25 ans après*

was given the official seal of approval by Malraux who enshrined the ideological function of the New Wave in 1965 by declaring to the French National Assembly: 'The French cinema that matters consists of a very small number of films, most of them made by young people'.¹⁴

14 *Le Film Français* 22 October 1965

The ambivalence of French attitudes towards America was also at the core of the French film industry and is evident in the conflicting discourses emanating from different quarters of the cinematic institution. Producers and makers of French films, who stood to lose most from the competition, were unsurprisingly hostile, as were some independent local exhibitors unable to obtain the French films which, they claimed, their audiences most wanted to see.¹⁵ For them, American cinema was the prime cause of the perpetual 'crisis' affecting French cinema for the familiar reason: the unfair competition created by the dumping of too many movies, cheap to distribute and yet visibly made with much more money than their French counterparts, and thus supposedly more attractive. On the other hand, a large number of distributors were in American hands since the 1920s, feeding the major exhibition circuits with American and French products, and in less visible ways, sectors of 'French' production too, particularly from the late 1950s onwards when the collapse of the Hollywood studio system made European production attractive (if not necessary).¹⁶ A survey conducted by *Arts* magazine in 1959 identified the following American companies as having a share in French distribution: Paramount, Fox, Columbia, MGM, United Artists, Warner Brothers and Universal. It commented:

15 Claude Degand, 'Vingt ans de cinéma français in *La Cinématographie française*, no 2 113 (1965)

It is partly thanks to [these American companies] that French distribution can balance its books. Like Gaumont or Cocinor, they give important advances to producers; in some cases they are, *de facto*, producers only. One can therefore say that the rule of the producer is over, and that of the distributor has started.¹⁷

16 See Guback, 'Hollywood's international market', Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, Christopher Wagstaff 'Italian cinema in an international market BFI 1991 summer-school paper, and Ulrike Sieglöhr 'New German cinema and Hollywood', BFI 1991 summer-school paper

17 Jean Douchet Gilbert Guez Luc Mouillet and Jacques Boussac, 'Les distributeurs sont les vrais patrons du cinéma', *Arts*, 2 December 1959

As a result, the trade press blithely reflected the American involvement in French cinema, much to the outrage of anti-Americanists who berated *Le Film Français* (the major French film trade paper) for devoting an entire issue to the 'adulation of 20th Century Fox "illustrious" Director General Joseph M. Schenk'.¹⁸ At the time of the release of *Alphaville*, the same paper triumphantly reported on the annual MGM-France conference under the heading: 'MGM – 1965–1966: the year of great films! The year of great stars!'¹⁹ Similarly, the popular film press – *Pour Vous*, *Cinémonde*, *Ciné-Revue* – had always devoted large amounts of space to Hollywood. My own spot-checks of issues of *Cinémonde* throughout

18 Quoted by Winock in *The Rise and Fall of Anti-Americanism* p 69

19 *Le Film Français* 9 September 1965 p 7

the 1950s and early 1960s show that out of the major stories, one third to half of the features are on French cinema, the rest being on American, Italian and British cinema (particularly the James Bond movies) – more or less reflecting the sharing out of the French market by the films themselves. I am not in a position to comment on how many of the stories were planted by publicity departments and how many reflected genuine ‘popular taste’, but these magazines certainly give a better view of an audience-led history of French cinema than most ‘official’ histories which virtually ignore the impact of Hollywood (and other non-French cinema) on the French domestic market and on French audiences. It is also noticeable that in the 1960s there is the rise of items devoted to extra-cinematic matters, in particular pop music

The discourse of French embracing of US culture was most spectacular of course from high-brow critics, and in particular the *Cahiers* group, who made Hollywood central to their critical theory and especially to their notion of authorship.²⁰ However, in their fascination with US cinema, they were totally oblivious to Hollywood’s role in the French film market. This negation of the social and industrial aspects of cinema led to interesting inconsistencies in their positions: they despised the ‘studio-bound’ French cinema of the 1940s and 1950s but extravagantly praised products of the Hollywood studio system; they proposed to remedy the ‘crisis’ of French cinema while ignoring one of its major causes.

²⁰ French critics had in fact always been concerned with Hollywood, even before André Bazin. See Richard Abel’s *French Film Theory & Criticism* vols I and II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). On the New Wave’s relation to Hollywood in critical terms, see the *Cahiers du cinéma* anthologies, vols I and II and Thomas Elsaesser, ‘Two decades in another town: Hollywood and the *cinéphiles*’ in Chris Bigsby (ed.), *Superculture, American Popular Culture and Europe* (London: Paul Elek 1975).

Different films for different audiences

The reasons for the emergence of the New Wave have already been substantially analysed elsewhere. Apart from the cultural/ideological conjunction of the beginnings of the Fifth Republic discussed above, a number of determinants have been invoked, which I will summarize briefly:

- a) technical/industrial: the availability of faster film stock, light cameras and portable sound recording equipment (the Nagra); the desire/necessity on the part of New Wave directors to bypass the structural constraints of the French film industry at the time – lengthy professional training, union crews, and the large film budgets associated with studio shooting;
- b) ‘aesthetic-positive’: the influence of types of American cinema (1940s film noir, thrillers, B movies), of television reporting techniques, of neo-realism and in particular Roberto Rossellini, of the ethnographic cinema of Jean Rouch, of developments in literary narrative techniques (the Nouveau Roman);
- c) ‘aesthetic-negative’: the rejection of mainstream French genre cinema, in particular costume dramas and serious social dramas, and of the French star system,

d) market: the demise of the classical Hollywood studio system and the rise of 'European art cinema' as a marketing force on the world stage

To my mind, items a) and b) above have been well covered already²¹ and I do not wish to repeat those histories, choosing instead to concentrate on points c) and d), focusing particularly on the area which has attracted the least attention so far, that of the audience.

Despite industry discourses which always emphasized a state of 'crisis', and (retrospectively) the Truffaut-inspired view of a routine-bound, moribund film industry, French cinema experienced a rapid renaissance after World War 2, this despite the notorious Blum-Byrnes Franco-American treaty which is traditionally viewed as having stifled French production. In March 1946 Léon Blum, as part of an official commercial delegation, was sent by the French government to the USA, to negotiate a wide-ranging commercial deal, in which the cinema was but a tiny part. His brief included 'clearing French war debts from both World War 1 and 2, dealing with confiscated German properties, and obtaining financial and economic help for France. Blum was severely attacked for having 'sold out' the French market to the Americans, but in retrospect it is clear that this hostility was partly fuelled by political considerations, especially the Communists' hostility to the Socialist Blum; by comparison the more damaging 1933 treaty mentioned earlier, had provoked less controversy. The quota of French films that was worked out by Blum and Byrnes (French cinemas should show French films to a capacity of four weeks out of thirteen, upped to five weeks in 1948) was in fact fairly similar to the pre-war ratio of French to American films. With hindsight, we can also see that the quota of French films allowed to be shown roughly reflected the potential production capacity of the French film industry at the time; in other words, on an American-free French market, it is doubtful that many more French films could have been made. In this respect, I would agree with Jean-Pierre Jeancolas that the Blum-Byrnes agreement probably protected French cinema more than it destroyed it. Of course, it could be argued that the considerable American presence since the 1920s curtailed French production anyway, but one can only speculate as to what an American-free, peacetime French market would be.

In any case, by 1949, the production level was back to pre-war levels of over one hundred films a year and after that, the French production level – importantly boosted by coproductions from 1948 onwards, in particular with Italy²² – was comparable to that of other major European countries; it was superior to the UK and Germany, though lower than Italy, until 1975 when this last trend was reversed and France became the first feature-film producing country in Western Europe.²³ There are traceable institutional reasons for this.

²¹ See Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1968), *Cahiers du cinéma* anthologies, vols I and II, Steve Lipkin, *The New Wave and the post-war French film economy* in Bruce A. Austin (ed.) *Current Research in Film Audiences, Economics and Law* (vol. 2) (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1986), Terry Lovell 'Sociology and the cinema', *Screen*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1971), pp. 15–26, Paul Monaco *Ribbons in Time: Movies and Society Since 1945* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), James Monaco *The New Wave* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Roy Armes *French Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1985), Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, *Le Cinéma des Français – la Ve République, 1859–1978* (Paris: Stock, 1979), Bernard Eisenschitz, *Histoires de l'histoire (deux périodes du cinéma français: le muet – la génération de 1958)* in *Défense du cinéma français* (Paris: Maison de la Culture de la Seine-Saint-Denis, 1975).

²² Coproductions with Italy formed the mainstay of the tradition of quality', in Jean-Pierre Jeancolas's words, the Paris-Rome cinematic axis was efficient until the end of the 1950s and beyond, and continued to bear fruit until the 1970s. It was one of the keys to the renaissance of both [French and Italian] cinemas. Jean-Pierre Jeancolas 'Le Cadre' in Jean-Loup Passek (ed.), *D'un cinéma l'autre: Notes sur le cinéma français des années 50* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou and Cinéma/Singulier, 1988), p. 24.

²³ For comparative production figures see UNESCO *Statistics on Film & Cinema*, 1955–77.

The Vichy government thoroughly reorganized the industry's institutional framework (largely along the lines of projects elaborated in the 1930s), with the CNC (Centre National de la Cinématographie) at its centre, a state organization financed roughly half and half by state subsidies and trade levies, through which some of the box-office revenues, including those from American films, could be channelled into French production. The CNC's brief, apart from providing a legal and financial controlling and monitoring framework for the industry, was to encourage the rebuilding of film theatres damaged during the war or outdated, and the production of French films, in particular in the 'non-commercial' sector. Thus the seeds of state-sponsored 'art' films which would be crucial to the New Wave and the future of French cinema as a whole were planted very early on. A number of further regulations governing state aid for film production (the *fonds de développement* in 1948, the *soutien financier* in 1953) culminated in the *avance sur recettes* in 1959, which was particularly important in promoting first films, one of the hallmarks of the New Wave.

One striking paradox of the French cinema is that while its production level has been on a par with, or higher than, other European countries, and while its film culture has been exceptionally vital since the 1920s, its home audience has always been tiny compared to its European neighbours: in 1957, 411 million people went to the cinema in France, against 745 million in Italy and 915 million in the UK. Yet this relatively small 1957 figure represents the peak of French audiences (in turn, the subsequent decline has been relatively less dramatic than elsewhere, since by 1989 France had overtaken other Western European countries, with 120 million annual spectators).²⁴ The fact that French popular audiences peaked later than elsewhere can be explained by a number of demographic and cultural factors. Television did not make a real impact on French households until the mid-1960s. At the same time, the post-war baby boom and the rural exodus combined to swell French large cities, especially Paris. Up to that point, French audiences had been much smaller than other comparable nations in Europe because of the high rural composition of the country, France had (still has) few really large cities, which is where cinemas are located. The general decline that would have set in, as it did elsewhere, was thus paradoxically offset by the 'backwardness' of France.²⁵ At the same time, important changes in the composition of the domestic audience took place in the 1950s, partly disguised by the relative overall stability, and by the fact that in France global figures hide tremendous differences, generally, but especially in rates of attendance, between Paris, the industrial North East, and the Côte d'Azur on the one hand, and the rest of the cultural 'French desert' on the other. Though the decline in French audiences was less steep in France than elsewhere, 56 million annual spectators did drop out

²⁴ For detailed audience figures see *La Cinématographie française. Le Film français* and UNESCO statistics 1955–77. For the most recent statistics see *European Market & Media Fact* (Zenith Media Worldwide 1990).

²⁵ *Bulletin d'Information du CNC* nos 99–100 (1966).

between 1957 and 1960, the years of the rise of the New Wave, if we locate its beginnings with Roger Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme* (1956). These 56 million were, predominantly, members of the popular audience. This is because, although Paris and large cities gained an enormous amount of people, at the same time, another movement within these cities (and in Paris in particular) was pushing them towards the suburbs – a cultural environment which did not promote cinema attendance. More detailed audience figures show a sharp decline in the box-office takings of Parisian local and suburban cinemas after 1957, while that of the first-run (*exclusivité*) cinemas situated in the city centres remained stationary or even went up.²⁶

The French audience that had got into the habit of going regularly to the 'Saturday night' cinema was dwindling. At the same time, since the end of the war, a new audience had been created by the work of the cine-club movement and the rise of the *art et essai* cinemas (in existence since the 1920s), and in Paris by the screenings of Henri Langlois's *Cinémathèque*. Importantly, this audience was now beginning to attend the city centre *exclusivité* cinemas as well as the art houses. As Claude Degand remarked 'It is precisely at the time when the cinema declares, not without justification, that it is in danger of death, that it sees a new audience, a more selective, more educated one . . . getting used to more and more difficult films, in the style of Bergman, Fellini or Antonioni, films which in the past would not have been "showable" anywhere else than in a cine-club or an art house' ²⁷ One sign of this phenomenon was the triumphant re-release of Jean Renoir's *La Grande illusion* in 1958 in a major Champs Elysées *exclusivité* cinema. Thus the New Wave did not simply 'create' new audiences because that audience already existed, rather it partly filled the gap left by the withdrawal of some of the old popular audience. At the centre of this new audience was a 'hard core' of *cinéphiles* (largely responsible for the resilience of French cinema today on the home market). They were predominantly young, male, and educated, and they lived in Paris, 'the Mecca of the *cinéphile*'.²⁸ It is not just New Wave filmmakers who realized that these changes were taking place (they were themselves, of course, part of that new audience). The French film industry too noticed these shifts in the 1950s, and began to cater for these new audiences by special major re-releases of classics, as mentioned above, and by changing the look of the cinemas themselves. Claude Degand noted in 1965 that new cinemas were being built, in a 'more sober and "*virile*" style than the old-fashioned popular cinemas'²⁹ (my emphasis). In this light, we can then perhaps recast the characters who prevailed in New Wave films – identified by Terry Lovell as 'marginal men, disaffected intellectuals, students' – as homological, not just to the filmmakers (an interpretation they encouraged), but also to the audience they knew they were addressing, whose core was increasingly a young

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Claude Degand in *La Cinématographie française* no 2,113 (1965), p 32

²⁸ R. Guyonnet quoted by Charles-Albert Michalet, *Le Drôle d'homme du cinéma français* (Paris: La Découverte 1987), p 170. Guyonnet indicates that 'There are more than 800 cinemas in the city and its periphery twice as many as in New York

²⁹ Degand *La Cinématographie Française*, no 2,113 (1965)

male, bourgeois stratum of the French population. The idea of the narcissistic relation between filmmaker and audience was implicit in Truffaut's statement: 'the film of tomorrow will look like the person who made it, and the number of spectators will be proportional to the number of friends the director has'.³⁰ Concurrently, the popular audience did not vanish entirely, but continued to coexist with the *cinéphile* one, a parallel strand with different cultural values. Its habits, nevertheless, were changing, and after the peak of 1957, it became increasingly an occasional rather than a regular audience, as subsequent CNC surveys have shown (hence the importance, from the 1960s onwards, of the French 'blockbuster' to draw that audience in).

One major way in which the two audiences distinguished themselves was in their relation to American cinema. The *cinéphile* audience preferred American cinema, the popular one French films. The streaming of the French film audiences between Parisian *cinéphile* and popular ran along class and geography lines – the further cinema-goers lived away from Paris, the less likely they were to enjoy American films. The more working class the audience, the more they preferred French films. The 1964 CNC survey showed that the box-office revenue of, for instance, *An American in Paris* (1951) and *The Guns of Navarone* (1961), decreased in relative terms from Paris to small towns, and further to rural areas. A number of opinion polls³¹ with French audiences showed the following results in the comparative popularity of French and American cinema. I am aware that these figures have to be treated with care – the surveys drew on different samples of the population – the trends, however, are consistent

31 1947 poll was conducted at the Gaumont-Palace cinema. 1949 poll at the Rex – both very large popular cinemas. The 1954 poll conducted by the CNC doesn't give details – quoted in Jacques Durand, *Le Cinéma et son public* (Paris: Sirey 1958). 1956 to 1958 polls from Arts. 2 December 1959. 1962 to 1964 polls from the 1964 CNC survey – *Bulletin d'informations du CNC* nos 99–100.

	Prefer French films	Prefer American films
1947 (Gaumont-Palace, Paris)	69.00	11.00
1949 (Rex, Paris)	61.30	n.a.
1954 (CNC – no detail)	76.00	38.00
1956 } Arts magazine, no detail)	48.60	33.58
1957 }	50.02	32.29
1958 }	48.60	30.45
1962 } (CNC – no detail)	50.90	29.56
1964 }	48.85	30.41

Another 1959 survey³² conducted among 2,000 filmgoers in 1959 indicated that, apart from the thriller (which ranked second highest at twenty per cent), several specifically American genres were

unpopular: the western only scored two per cent, science fiction only one per cent. In the reference years of the survey, the number of French films was either equal or inferior to the American ones, which goes to show that the impact of American cinema on French audiences cannot be judged simply by the numbers of films shown. Similarly, in the 1930s, when French films at times were only a quarter of all films released on the French market, box-office results showed, for the years when such statistics are known (1936 to 1938), an overwhelmingly greater popularity for French movies over American ones. The 1964 CNC survey shows that by far the most rejected category was that of subtitled films, which included many American films. At the same time, however, the four most popular films of the survey include three non-French ones, all released in dubbed versions: *The Guns of Navarone* (USA), *The Ten Commandments* (1956, USA) and *Sissi* (1955, Austria), while the most popular was a French film – Jean-Paul Le Chanois's *Les Misérables* (1957). These contradictions – between the avowed low popularity of American films in surveys, and yet their good score at the box office – can be explained in two ways. First of all, box-office figures tended to be based on the *exclusivité* releases in Paris and big city centres, rather than the whole career of a film. Since, as already mentioned, the popularity of American films decreased as one went away from Paris, overall box-office ratings for the whole of France might have looked quite different. Secondly, class distinctions informed the reception of American culture. It is thus necessary to refine the notion of American culture as popularly embraced mentioned at the beginning of this piece. At the risk of making too neat a distinction, I would propose two modes of reception of American culture in France in the 1945–65 period: an 'original version' one, and a 'dubbed' one. Music provides a good comparison. Jazz, though a French 'passion' (measurable in numbers of French jazz record and CD compilations, biographies of jazz musicians, jazz magazines, and so on), remained, in its original version (at least until recently), very much the preserve of the urban middle classes³³ – for film portrayals see Jacques Becker's *Rendez-vous de juillet* (1949), Véra Belmont's *Rouge Baiser* (1985), and Bertrand Tavernier's *Round Midnight* (1986). At the same time, jazz had long found its way, in reworked forms, into French popular music, through the music hall (Josephine Baker), French singers (Charles Trenet, Mireille), and musicians such as the Ray Ventura swing band, who featured in a number of popular films of the 1930s and 1940s. *Nous irons à Paris*, a Ray Ventura 'and his college boys' vehicle, was the French hit of 1949. By contrast, films such as Roger Vadim's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* 1960 and Louis Malle's *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* (1958) built their class-based audience appeal through the use of original jazz composers (respectively Thelonious Monk and Miles Davis).

³³ See Francis Newton *The Jazz Scene* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1960) and Paul Olivier, 'Jazz is where you find it, the European experience of jazz' in Bigsby (ed.) *Superculture*.

Jazz music as emblem of
French youth dissent: *Rendez-
vous de juillet*.



In the 1960s, a similar phenomenon took place around rock and pop music. The pages of *Cinéma* are testimony to the enthusiasm for French pop artists (especially Johnny Halliday and Sylvie Vartan who also featured in films), and give far less space to, for example, Elvis Presley. Godard, as ever, was perceptive about this phenomenon, in his use of Martial Solal's reworking of jazz for the music of *A Bout de souffle*, one example of the 'double coding' which works throughout the film (the dual appeal of Jean-Paul Belmondo, the French actor evoking Bogart, the American star) addressing the 'two audiences', the *cinéphile* and the popular one – probably the secret of the relative box-office success of the film. It should also be pointed out that a lot of 'original' American culture, in the form of consumer goods such as cars, jeans and Coca-Cola, though culturally prominent as *images*, left vast sections of the French population, and in particular the working classes, untouched until the late 1960s. French workers, including people in their twenties, interviewed in the 1964 CNC survey declared a dislike for American cinema because: 'they always show luxury things. Whereas a good French film, a good thriller, shot in Paris or in the provinces, that's something else.'³⁴ One might speculate that the popularity of the US thrillers was connected to the fact that the image of America they offered was not, on the whole, a luxury one.

As we will see, popular French thrillers show this acceptance of US culture in its 'dubbed' version – in other words when it is made French, in particular through what I call the 'domesticated American', archetypally Eddie Constantine.

34 1964 CNC survey, p. 14

Constructing a French national identity: the New Wave and 'daddy's cinema'

The mainstream, or 'daddy's' French cinema of the post-war period, before the New Wave, is traditionally considered worthless, both in France (Bernard Eisenschitz calls the 1950s the 'dullest decade in French cinema', Claire Clouzot sees it 'in a state of sclerosis'³⁵) and outside; it is always thought of as 'formulaic', at worst a pale copy of Hollywood or at best proposing a kind of 'naive realism'.³⁶ As I said at the beginning of this piece, these accounts can easily be traced back to the New Wave rhetoric, spear-headed by Truffaut's famous vitriolic piece, 'A certain tendency of the French cinema'. My suspicion is that Truffaut's view has been perpetuated, partly because his rhetoric was so attractive, and partly because the films were unavailable or people did not bother to see them; it is interesting, though, that the wholesale condemnation of French 'formulaic' cinema went hand in hand with the praising of Hollywood 'genres'. This is not the only inconsistency arising from the piece – for instance the condemnation of craftsmanship in French cinema is at odds with the emphasis on Hollywood mise-en-scene. But then it is the *Cahiers* contributors' promotion of Hollywood rather than French cinema that made them so easily acceptable outside France; by contrast the writings of the *Positif* group, often hostile to the New Wave, have remained largely untranslated.³⁷

The reasons why the *Cahiers* group needed to disown mainstream French cinema so violently have been well explained in terms of a generation of filmmakers' desire to create a place for themselves in the French film industry, on a 'move over, here I come' basis.³⁸ I also want to suggest that the desire to serve a specific middle-class, *cinéphile*, and increasingly international audience meant that they had to distance themselves from a cinema that *addressed* a popular French audience through narrative, stylistic, and referential patterns with roots in indigenous French culture. In addition to which, as Pierre Bourdieu has shown,³⁹ any aesthetic discourse needs to create a 'bad other' in order to justify itself and establish its cultural and ideological legitimacy, because that is the basis of its economic survival. In this distancing process, Hollywood occupied a crucial place, and played the same role that other aspects of American culture – in the form of literature, jazz, or science fiction⁴⁰ – played for French intellectuals, that of a focus for dissent. This was essential for those who wished to detach themselves from mainstream French forms – officially because they were tainted with 'embourgeoisement' and 'realism' (for instance writers like Queneau and Boris Vian liked American science fiction because of its 'pop', non-realistic, quality),⁴¹ but also because many of them had little interest in, if not distaste for, French working-class culture which

³⁵ Eisenschitz 'Histoires de l'histoire', p. 30. Claire Clouzot *Le Cinéma français depuis la Nouvelle vague* (Paris: Fernand Nathan, 1972). See also François Truffaut, 'A certain tendency of the French cinema' in Bill Nichols (ed.), *Movies & Methods*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976).

³⁶ See Lovell 'Sociology and the cinema'. Lipkin, 'The New Wave and the post-war film economy and Monaco: Ribbons in Time'.

³⁷ With the exception of Graham (ed.), *The New Wave*.

³⁸ In particular see Claire Pajackowska 'Liberté! Egalité! Paternité!' Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville's *Save qui peut (la vie!)* in Susan Hayward and Ginette Vincendeau (eds) *French Film, Texts and Contexts* (London: Routledge, 1990) and Daney, 'The New Wave – a genealogical approach'.

³⁹ See Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of Kant's Critique of Judgement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) and Jean-Paul Simon 'La Double production' in Bernard Miegé (ed.), *La Production du cinéma* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1980).

⁴⁰ See Bigsby (ed.) *Superculture*.

⁴¹ Gerard Cordesse, 'The impact of American science-fiction on Europe', and Olivier 'Jazz is where you find it' in Bigsby (ed.) *Superculture*.

⁴² Elsaesser 'Two decades in another country'

kept its enthusiasm for classical narrative, both in literature and film. Unwittingly (perhaps) they reproduced in the Hollywood-French tradition of quality divide some of the high-low culture dichotomy that they (and André Bazin) had been careful to erase precisely in their praise of American culture.⁴² One massive exception to this rule was the thriller, both in literature and cinema, which in translation achieved mass circulation, and where elite and popular tastes met. As I will argue, this was also because the genre – literary and cinematic – already had a long history in French culture.

Because of the need for the New Wave to distance itself from mainstream French cinema, continuities between the two have been repressed, particularly in terms of their construction of a national identity. As a full-scale study of this topic is impossible here, I will concentrate on two aspects: language and Paris

From the moment sound film came to France, popular French cinema was criticized for having too much dialogue, being too theatrical, too much a 'cinema of scriptwriters'. This trend has continued to the present day and was prominent in the 1950s in several genres: literary adaptations of course, but also comedies and melodramas. This, I want to suggest, was one way French cinema specifically addressed a popular French audience in its 'Frenchness' This is related, first of all, to the high cultural status of the national tongue in France, where it is seen as central to the French cultural patrimony, a symbol of Jacobin centralization and integration propagated through the education system. Schoolteachers' enthusiasm for dictation, for instance, has been hardly slowed down by modern language learning methods, and dictation has recently triumphed as *entertainment* in the astonishing popularity of Bernard Pivot's '*dictée*' (a national competition) at a time when the French language is perceived as being under particular threat from American-English (Euro-Disneyland again).⁴³ Secondly, the influx of English-speaking films accentuated the emphasis on a recognized *French* tradition of writing, often that of middle-brow popular classics. The use of literary dialogue, derided by Truffaut, goes back to the 1930s, with popular audiences relishing witticisms, turns of phrases, and actors with remarkable diction. Sacha Guitry is an obvious example, in the 1950s, Gérard Philipe and Edwige Feuillère, to name but two, grounded their popularity in their ability to speak their lines beautifully, one of the few costume dramas of that period to have achieved critical recognition in recent years, Jacqueline Audry's *Olivia* (1950), bases the seductive powers of the Feuillère character in her reading of the French classics. In this respect, the New Wave appears to be opposed to this tradition, in its opting for improvisation, original scripts, or high-brow modernist literary language (for example Marguerite Duras in *Hiroshima mon amour*) Another important aspect of the use of language is that accents and

⁴³ Even though studies have shown that less than two per cent of new French words are of Anglo-American origins. See Lacorne et al (eds) *The Rise and Fall of Anti Americanism*

44 Michel Marie 'It really makes you sick – Jean-Luc Godard's *A Bout de souffle*' in Hayward and Vincendeau (eds), *French Film Texts and Contexts* p. 209

slang – according to class and region – are at the basis of many popular comedies and some of the social melodramas of the 1940s and 1950s. In this respect, Michel Marie's claim that Michel Poiccard (the Belmondo character in *A Bout de souffle*) was 'the first film character to violate the refined sound conventions of 1959 French cinema by using popular slang and the most trivial spoken French'⁴⁴ is, to my mind, overstating the case. To take a few examples: Henry Verneuil's *Le Mouton à cinq pattes* (1954) has Fernandel play six different characters with different language registers; the conversations between Jean Gabin and his fellow truck drivers in *Des Gens sans importance* (1956) or with the sailors in *La Marie du port* (1950), are hardly examples of 'refined sound conventions', and nor are they examples of scriptwriter vulgarisms; they are quite accurate renderings of the socio-linguistic register of the referential world evoked. Besides, the central tradition in French scriptwriting, from Prévert to Jeanson and Audiard, has always been to mix slang and idiomatic expressions with standard French – characteristics which of course have made the films difficult to export. The New Wave, Godard in particular, transcended this by combining an international visual idiom (Bogart, and so on) with a very specifically French dialogue track, as have recent successful 'postmodern' French films like *Diva* (1981) or *Nikita* (1990), where the – exportable – international visual idiom is that of commercials and music videos. The use of the criminal milieu's slang and of foreign accents in the thrillers is one major way in which the films construct notions of national identity, of belonging and of rejection.

Paris, with New York, must be the most frequently filmed city in the world, with its long tradition in the arts, from painting and photography, to theatre, novels and songs. While this is connected to the obvious aesthetic qualities of the city, it is also underpinned by precise economic and ideological factors. In terms of culture in general, Paris concentrates the vast majority of French structures and personnel, in films, this involves most of the studios and other filmmaking facilities, film financial centres, and audiences; it is thus hardly surprising that the city would be incessantly reflected in the films. The thrillers, as we will see, are no exception.

Early French cinema, and for instance the Feuillade serials, made a tremendous use of the city, offering a dual vision of it: the documentary, 'involuntary' realism that comes from location shooting in home-movie conditions, and the sense of the city as a massive playground – both aspects which the New Wave tried to recapture – in *A Bout de souffle*, *Les 400 coups*, *Paris nous appartient* (1958), *Vivre sa vie* (1962), *Céline et Julie vont en bateau* (1974), and so on. The 1930s and to some extent the 1940s presented a more stylized, yet meticulously documented, view of the city, with the sets of Lazare Meerson, Alexandre Trauner and Max Douy. This tradition was continued in the 1950s by Douy (*French*

Cancan [1955], *La Traversée de Paris* [1956]) and Trauner, and others such as Jean d'Eaubonne (*Casque d'or* [1952]), Georges Wakhevitch and Léon Barsacq.

Constructions of Paris in the 1950s, however, experienced important changes prompted by two sociocultural phenomena: the influx of provincials on the one hand, and the rise of international tourism on the other. This accelerated the process of Parisian 'self-quotation' already well advanced, and resulted in the development of what I would call the 'city as postcard'. A huge number of post-war films had either the word Paris in the title, or a name associated with a very familiar Parisian landmark, always one associated with an entertainment spot *Casino de Paris* (1957), *Folies-Bergère* (1956), *French Cancan*, *Une Parisienne* (1957), *Nous irons à Paris*, *La Traversée de Paris*, *Paris nous appartient* and *Paris au mois d'août* (1966).

In this respect, the New Wave followed in the footsteps of traditional French cinema, simply inflecting it to address its different audience. To pursue the postcard analogy, one finds at one end of the spectrum in the 1950s, Richard Pottier's *Le Chanteur de Mexico* (1956) as pop or kitsch colour postcard: views of the Eiffel Tower, the Sacré-Coeur and the Arc de Triomphe, actually framed as postcards (and significantly the two heroes of the film, played by Luis Mariano and Bourvil, are two provincials who have just 'come up' to try and make it in the big city); at the other end of the spectrum we find *A Bout de souffle* as the cool black-and-white snap of the Champs Elysées (incidentally the film-industry headquarters). But tourism, however hip, is not far off, for although Michel Poiccard talks contemptuously of these 'tourist jerks', he later informs us, over a lyrical (ironical?) tracking shot on the monuments on Place de la Concorde, that 'all the same, it's beautiful'. Not coincidentally, some of the French films admired by the *Cahiers* group, for instance Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le flambeur* (1956) were 'love letters to Paris'. The connection between this focus on Paris and the address to an international audience is unavoidable, and roughly at the same time the Americans were filming their own postcards of Paris: *An American in Paris* (1951), *Gigi* (1957), and *Funny Face* (1957).⁴⁵ Interestingly, whether in New Wave or mainstream French films, the Paris that was represented tended to be the glamorous, nineteenth-century city centre (whose blackened buildings were, at the time of the New Wave, undergoing a massive clean up initiated by Malraux, known as *le ravalement*). The few directors – Godard in *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* and *Alphaville*, Tati in *Mon Oncle* (1953) and *Playtime* (1968) – who looked beyond this centre, towards the modern city or the suburbs, usually recoiled in horror at their 'inhumanity', and contrasted it with a warmer, older, environment. But then their audience did not live, precisely, in those 'inhuman' suburbs or modern buildings.



Americans in Paris: Jean Seberg (right) on the Champs Elysées in *A Bout de souffle* (courtesy of Productions Béla).

⁴⁵ The postcard effect is also clear in films like Jacqueline Audry's *L'ingénue libertine* (1950), which inserts in the otherwise studio interiors a location-shot walk along the banks of the Seine, which the Colette novel written several decades before situates in the equally Parisian but much less touristy 17th arrondissement

Those who did start watching television instead, where, as Serge Daney points out, the heirs to the 'tradition of quality' of mainstream French cinema had gone.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ See Daney, 'A genealogical approach'



Americans in Paris: Fred Astaire on the Champs-Élysées in *Funny Face*.

The *policier* as inter-national text

The American gangster/thriller film was the most popular American genre in France. Moreover, American gangster/thriller movies were popular both with the elite *cinéphile*, audience, and with the popular audience – a class cross-over also true of detective fiction.⁴⁷

Although crime films had been made in France more or less since the beginnings of the cinema, the post-war period saw the significant rise of the French *policier* as one of the two dominant genres in French popular cinema (the other one being comedy). From the 1950s to the 1960s, most French directors worked in the genre, from mainstream filmmakers like Henri Verneuil and Gilles Grangier, to

⁴⁷ 15 million detective/crime novels were sold in France in 1964

48 And are still in the 1980s: see Bill Marshall's paper 'Hegemony and the film *policier* in France in the 1980s', for the Popular European Cinema Conference, University of Warwick, 14–17 September 1989 – to be published (details not available)

49 Arts, 17 March 1954.

50 François Le Grix, 'Le romantisme du sordide', *Écrits de Paris*, July–August 1954, p. 124.



Fedora hat and trench-coat in Montmartre: Roger Duchesne (left) in *Bob le flambeur*.

Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol, and more recently Maurice Pialat, Jean-Jacques Beineix and Luc Besson.⁴⁸

Traditionally, the popularity of the *policier* in the 1950s is attributed to its derivation from the Hollywood gangster/thriller, fostered by the sudden influx of many American film noirs in the second half of the 1940s, following their ban during the war. This, in turn, snowballed because of the drive to repeat successful formulae. Thus the enormous success of Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* (1954), a film not presented at the Cannes film festival because it 'gave the wrong idea of French cinema',⁴⁹ and considered by some French critics at the time as 'in the best Hollywood tradition',⁵⁰ is credited with starting a spate of imitations: Jules Dassin's *Du rififi chez les hommes* (1954), Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le flambeur*, Henri Decoin's *Razzia sur la chnouf* (1955), Gilles Grangier's *Le Rouge est mis* (1957), and so on. Similarly, the success of *La Môme vert-de-gris* in 1952 prompted the Eddie Constantine series, of which the most prominent are: *Les Femmes s'en balancent* (1954), *Ça va barder* (1954), *Cet homme est dangereux* (1955), *Je suis un sentimental* (1955), and that of *Maigret tend un piège* (1957), the making of *Maigret et l'affaire Saint-Fiacre* (1959) and *Maigret voit rouge* (1963), all three starring Jean Gabin. Several other 'mini series' could be mentioned, such as the *Gorille* films starring Lino Ventura. The impact of American cinema on the *policier* is undeniable, particularly in iconographic terms: trench-coats, fedora hats and guns. However, as soon as we look at other visual motifs such as the dark city streets, and narrative concerns – with violence, crime, and the conflict between law and lawlessness – we find that, rather than a simple case of 'influence', the French *policier* is a rich network of intertextual relations, ranging from imitations, reworkings and parodies, to mere allusions and, importantly, autonomous parallel forms. The Americans may have cornered the market in gangsters, they do not have a monopoly on crime and mystery.

The *policier* was very popular with French audiences not just because it evoked the world of American gangsters, perceived as glamorous and exciting both in Hollywood films and in the *Série noire* type of novels, but also because it built on several specifically French literary and filmic traditions, which both preceded, and worked in parallel to, the American ones. An often-quoted piece of dialogue in Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le flambeur*, makes the point.

- Is it true that he [Bob] was the first to imitate the American gangster?
- Actually, it was the Yanks who imitated the Bonnot gang.

To look for some clear-cut French origin would be futile not to say dangerously essentialist. Some attribute the literary origins of

51 See Francis Lacassin *Mythologie du roman policier*, 2 volumes (Paris 10/18 Union Générale d'Éditions 1974)

52 Raymond Chandler, 'The simple art of murder' in *Pearls are a Nuisance* (London: Penguin Books 1950) p. 198

53 Eugène Sue *Les Mystères de Paris*, tome 1 (Paris: Éditions Gallimard 1977) p. 15. First published 1842

the genre to the publication of Vidocq's memoirs in 1828; Vidocq, an ex-convict who became a Chief of Police, aptly symbolizes both the law-lawlessness conflict and the blurring of the distinction between the two that characterizes the genre. Watching many French *policiers*, one is struck by this at the acting level: the ubiquitous Jean Gabin, Paul Frankeur, Lino Ventura, Guy Decomble, Paul Meunisse, Marcel Bozzuffi, Robert Dalban, and a few others, embody with equal ease policemen and gangsters from one film to the next. Other writers⁵¹ trace the first detective to Auguste Dupin who appeared in 1841 in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the rue Morgue* (first translated into French in 1846 and retranslated by Baudelaire in 1855). Or, again, to the French serialized *Roman Populaire* and in particular Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1942), but then Sue's own literary antecedents included, as well as Vidocq's memoirs, the English Gothic novel. What is certain is that *Les Mystères de Paris* successfully fixed a constellation of elements which infiltrated several aspects of French literature, French detective and crime fiction, down to the Poetic Realist and noir films of the 1930s and 1940s. It is made up of the following elements: Paris – its streets and 'lower depths', crime and the struggle against it; and social observation, in particular of the proletariat and the criminal classes, conducted through the agency of an investigator who is male (and white), and a representative of either the law (or whatever form of authority) and/or the upper classes. Geographical location aside, this might be said to describe also the American thriller. Compare, for instance, Raymond Chandler's famous description of the private detective '... down these mean streets a man must go. . . . The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth' . . .⁵² with the opening words of *Les Mystères de Paris*: 'On 13 December 1838, on a dark and rainy night, a well-built man dressed in a rather mean overall, crossed the pont au Change and plunged into the Cité, in the maze of dark, narrow and tortuous streets. . . .'⁵³ Philip Marlowe and Rodolphe, the hero of *Les Mystères de Paris*, both take on the role of a modern knight in armour, their common hunting grounds the city streets, their object of investigation the working classes and dangerous classes.

Les Mystères de Paris's successful mix of social observation, crime and melodrama was echoed in a number of other nineteenth-century popular works such as those of Ponson du Terrail and Féval, as well as novels of a higher literary standing, for instance Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and in the populist literature of the 1920s and 1930s. Early twentieth-century French crime novels produced the figure of the *gentleman-cambrioleur* (gentleman-burglar – at that point the British influence was clear), in Gaston Leroux's Chéri-Bibi, Maurice Leblanc's Arsène Lupin and above all Marcel Allain and Pierre Souvestre's *Fantômas* (published 1911). These were adapted to film,

54 Murray Smith, 'Surrealism, popular culture and *fantômas*: surrealism in the service of itself?', Popular European Cinema Conference, University of Warwick, 14–17 September 1989.

An aesthetics of confined spaces: *Razzia sur la chnouf*.

most notoriously in Feuillade's *Fantômas* series (1913–14). Like the aristocrat Rodolphe in *Les Mystères de Paris*, *Fantômas* bridged the gap between the upper classes and the proletariat, above the heads of the established bourgeoisie. This 'anti-bourgeois' stance, as well as the taste for play-acting and disguise, endeared *Fantômas* not just to a wide popular audience, but to intellectuals too, especially the Surrealists, to whom it presented 'a cynical and dystopian vision of France which complemented the utopian vision of the US'.⁵⁴ Clearly, a similar appeal linked French crime fiction, American hard-boiled novels and films and the *policier* for French intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s.



55 See Claude Gauthier (ed.), *Simenon au cinéma* (Paris: Hatier, 1991).

In a different vein, but of equal consequence for the French *policier*, was the publication in 1931 of Georges Simenon's first Maigret novel, *Pietr-le-Letton*, followed by a prolific output, composed of two strands: the Maigret series and the 'atmosphere' novels. Though Simenon himself strongly disapproved of most of his film adaptations (and considered at one point directing them himself),⁵⁵ both the precise geographical and sociological anchoring of his novels, and the centrality of the middle-aged male inspector in the Maigret series, made his works ideally suited to classical French cinema. Both Poetic Realism in the 1930s and the noir tradition of the 1940s were marked by their evocative use of precise social decors, night scenes and chiaroscuro lighting, and thus perfectly matched to the exploration of the popular milieux favoured by Simenon. The French star system too, with the dominant place occupied by mature male actors – Harry Baur, Raimu, Michel

Simon, Albert Préjean and Jean Gabin – both served and in turn helped shape these narratives. Simenon's close, intimate, studies (as, indeed, crime fiction from other sources), also played a significant role in French cinema because they were well suited to the material limitations of French sound cinema which traditionally favoured intimate realism in art because of budget limitations. There in fact may lie its greatest difference with US thrillers, more devoted to – expensive – action scenes. This, as well as the focus on studio shooting determined an aesthetics of confinement (against which the New Wave rebelled with its valorization of location shooting) which suited the traditional enclosed spaces of the *policier*: back rooms, nightclubs, cafes. The domination of intimate realism over all genres partly explains why many French *policiers* take time with 'atmospheric' scenes which often do not advance the plot much, such as the famous moment in *Grisbi*, where Max (Gabin) and his friend eat French toast and *paté*.

Thus material constraints on the one hand, source texts and the French cinema's drive for realism on the other, all converged on a genre which, with its mystery and crime element, also provided entertainment. The relentless drive, started by Poe's Dupin and Rodolphe in *Les Mystères de Paris* to probe the secrets of the shadier corners of the city – what might be called 'social voyeurism' – continued with *Fantômas* and the *policiers* of the 1950s and finds a perfect expression in, for instance, *Maigret tend un piège*, a film devoted, beyond the overt mystery which Maigret has to solve, to exploring the 4th arrondissement of Paris. This area, known as the Marais, was in the 1950s a combination of aristocratic mansions, slums, and artisans' workshops, as well as a Jewish ghetto. Maigret's detection methods, which could be described as 'atmospheric empathy', perfectly overlapped with social voyeurism. The question of social observation is crucial to the French crime tradition beyond *policiers* strictly speaking. It is striking how many French films of the post-war period up to the mid 1960s used a crime narrative to explore class conflicts and the 'underbelly' of the French bourgeoisie: Autant-Lara's *En Cas de malheur* (1958) and Decoin's *La Vérité sur Bébé Donge* (1951), both based on Simenon, are telling examples, as are Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* (1943) and *Les Diaboliques* (1955). It has also been argued that the French *policier*, with its narratives of friendship and betrayal, was a way French cinema indirectly dealt with the trauma of the Vichy regime and the German occupation.⁵⁶ My view is that too direct an equation is unwarranted, since thrillers of all periods and nationalities feature male friendship and betrayal. However, the *policier* was undoubtedly a useful genre to explore such historical questions. An excellent example of how the generic features of the *policier* and film noir were used to that end is *Marie-Octobre*, a film directed by Julien Duvivier in 1959, as a cross between French filmed theatre

⁵⁶ See Robin Buss, *The French Through Their Films* (London Batsford 1988), Roy Armes, *French Cinema* (London Secker & Warburg 1985), and Guérif *Le Cinéma policier français*

Jean Gabin (foreground) in
Maigret tend un piège.



and an Agatha Christie-type country-house mystery. Members of an ex-resistance network are gathered by the only woman in the group, Marie-Octobre (Danielle Darrieux), in order to find out the traitor who caused the leader to be arrested and killed by the Gestapo fifteen years before. But *Marie-Octobre* is also a good example of the mixing of 'French' and 'American' elements. The entire action of the film is contained in two rooms in the big house, in the tradition of French filmed theatre, but the idea of crime and mystery, and the notion of exploring dark corners (in this case of French history) is neatly encapsulated by the credit sequence, shot in pure film-noir style. A car is driving along a French country road at night, the camera follows the movement of the car, mostly in track forward. Arriving at the mansion, the car is revealed to be American. What I have just described as 'pure film noir' connotes Hollywood, and yet, to return to my earlier point about the difficulty in disentangling national roots in the *policier*, it is worth mentioning that Duvivier, in his pre-war work, in particular with *Pépé le Moko* (1936), was a prominent exponent of French film noir. Duvivier, like Pierre Chenal – who directed the first version of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (as *Le Dernier tournant* [1939]) – Marcel Carné (with *Quai des brumes* for instance in 1938 and *Le Jour se lève* in 1939), Jean Renoir (with *La Chienne* [1931] and *La Bête humaine* [1938]), and other directors (including German émigrés like Robert Siodmak and Kurt Bernhardt), clearly influenced the American film noir of the 1940s, but also contributed to the building up of a French noir style. There is no space to develop this point here, but I will simply mention that consistent

stylistic patterns emerge, for instance of longer average shot lengths and more numerous camera movements in the French *policiers*, compared to their American counterparts. Thus French *policiers* may borrow visual motifs from US cinema, but in more subtle ways they are aware of, and construct, a national filmmaking style.

Another important aspect of the French *policier* is connected to a type of crime literature more directly inspired by the American hard-boiled tradition, and epitomized by the *Série noire* created by Marcel Duhamel, which also led to the coining of the term ‘film noir’. Duhamel’s involvement with American literature was a long-standing one – he translated many American novels in the 1930s and 1940s, including Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, and briefly served as Hemingway’s secretary. According to Duhamel’s autobiography, three novels lent him by the French playwright Marcel Achard (*This Man is Dangerous* and *Poison Ivy* by Peter Cheyney, and *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* by James Hadley Chase)⁵⁷ which he translated, led him to start the *Série noire*. Duhamel was no stranger to the film world either, acting in many films in the 1930s (including some of Renoir’s) and earning his bread and butter with dubbing. Though American detective fiction had been translated into French before – in the *Masques* collection for instance – his *Série noire* imprint at Gallimard became the focus of the tremendous success of this type of literature, and perhaps one of the most visible windows of the American presence in France. Chandler, Hammett, Thompson, Goodis and Spillane became household names and many French writers followed suit, sometimes under American pen names, particularly in the early days of the *Série noire*. At the same time, some French writers operated a fusion of the American hard-boiled school with French traditions. Albert Simonin and Auguste LeBreton are the two most prominent and their impact on the French *policier* was great. *Touchez pas au grisbi* was based on Simonin, *Du rififi chez les hommes* on LeBreton, who also scripted *Bob le flambeur* and *Le Rouge est mis*. The ‘Frenchness’ of their works resided primarily in the two areas discussed earlier: the use of Paris and language, erecting underworld slang as a new fashionable language (following in that in the footsteps of Eugène Sue)⁵⁸. At the same time as their use of slang emphasized Frenchness, that language itself reflected the impact of the USA – a number of words, for instance the verb *driver* for ‘to lead’, were neologisms made up of American borrowings.

In the same way, the 1950s *policier* is the film genre where the ambiguities of the Franco-American relationship come to the fore. Glamour is attached to all things American – looks, clothes, cars, drinks, music – yet the responsibility for serious crime (drugs) ultimately rests on them. Films tend to erect Americans and American methods (of crime, as well as crime fighting) as glamorous

⁵⁷ See Duhamel’s autobiography *Raconte pas ta vie* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), p. 491.

⁵⁸ See Nora Atkinson, *Eugène Sue et le roman-feuilleton* (Paris: A. Nizet & M. Bastard, 1929), and Jean-Louis Bory, *Eugène Sue Dandy mais socialiste* (Paris: Hachette Littérature, 1962).

and efficient and to contrast them favourably with the shoddiness of small-time French police work, only, ultimately, to knock them with the superiority of French ways, central to which is the *système D* (an expression in which the 'D' stands for '*débrouillard*', meaning cunning, resourceful, and adept at cheating the system) an important aspect of the popular French self-image. The opening of *Maigret voit rouge* is characteristic of this contrasting structure: we are in a local Parisian police station (the 10th arrondissement, near the Gare du Nord). The phone rings to call the police on the scene of a burglary; two inspectors come downstairs, one of them complaining about the petty, boring, nature of his work. The decor is dingy, with the recognizable iconography of French police (uniforms, telephone switchboard, seedy office). Cut to a car going down the streets of Paris at night, 'modern' jazz music on the soundtrack, the bright neon lights of the city flashing past, and characters speaking in English: 'Do you remember Paris' . . . 'Yes, Pigalle' . . .

The American presence is widespread in the *policiers* of the 1950s and early 1960s, but I will focus on a few films that are particularly interesting in this respect: *Je suis un sentimental*, one of the Eddie Constantine movies, directed by American expatriate John Berry in 1955, *Razzia sur la chnouf*, a fairly routine *policier* with documentary ambitions (the title means 'raid on drugs'), based on LeBreton and starring Jean Gabin; *Maigret voit rouge*, the third Maigret film, also starring Jean Gabin, and featuring a direct confrontation between Maigret and a FBI representative. I will also make references to *Le Rouge est mis* and two (internationally) better-known French *policiers*, Jacques Becker's *Touchez pas au grisbi* and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le flambeur*.

In all these films, the French image of all (male) Americans as tall and muscular finds its expression. In his movies, Eddie Constantine seems to tower above smaller, fatter, definitely out of shape French counterparts. In particular, he forms a picturesque contrast with bulky and puffy Paul Frankeur in *Je suis un sentimental*. In *Maigret voit rouge*, FBI man Harry MacDonald (Paul Carpenter) contrasts similarly with the shorter, heavy-set Maigret. Gabin plays the beer-bellied, pipe-smoking Maigret to the hilt, shuffling down corridors, sliding into armchairs with heavy sighs, and sharing ritualistic quantities of beer and sandwiches with his men. However, as he puts it to MacDonald, 'my inspectors may not take any exercise, but they have principles'. This is underscored by the ending of the narrative, which shows that MacDonald, supposedly a friend of Maigret's, tried to double-cross him (though the film ends in good spirit for both). Consumer goods predictably also contrast the French with the American. Gabin as Henri le Nantais in *Razzia* orders wine and champagne; as Maigret he drinks beer, of course, but when offered whisky (an American drink as far as the French are concerned) by MacDonald, quips 'perfect for arthritis', takes

Icons of Frenchness in the
 policier: the Citroën Traction
 Avant' in *Touchez pas au
 Grisbi* (courtesy of Rober
 Droits Audiovisuels)



one sip, winces and puts it aside. Cars, equally, hold chauvinistic values, but allow for more ambiguity. American cars (Chevrolets and Cadillacs are favourite) tend to be the cars of foreign villains, but also of some French ones. The greatest impact visually, however, is provided by the French Citroën Traction Avant (Traction for short), ubiquitous as both hoodlum and police cars, and a hallmark of the French *policier*. The later *Maigret voit rouge* features examples of the Peugeot 403 and Citroën DS, a mark of French modernity as well as the fact that the Traction (first released in 1934) stopped being manufactured in 1957.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ The Traction was also, notoriously, the car used by the Gestapo during the German occupation of France. Fittingly, a Traction features on the cover of Guerf's book (in a still from *Grisbi*), and is given a retrospective homage in Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Diva* (1986)

Icons of Frenchness in the
 policier: the Citroën 2CV in *Du
 Rififi chez les hommes*.



Cafes, bars and nightclubs offer the greatest latitude for the interplay between Frenchness and Americanness. A large section of *Maigret voit rouge* takes place at Le Manhattan, an American bar featuring a juke box, bowling alley and jazz music, and run by an Italian-American ex-mafioso; we find the same mediation of the American criminal through (mafia) Italians in *Le Rouge est mis*. In *Razzia*, Henri le Nantais runs Le Troquet, a nightclub with American connotations (boogie-woogie is played) despite its old-fashioned French slang name, though this is revealed as French 'for the Americans' since the Gabin character is supposed to have run a club with such a name in New York. In both cases, bars and nightclubs are places of deception and cover-up as well as fulfilling their more obvious narrative role as meeting places. By contrast, old-fashioned French cafes tend to be places of refuge (for Gabin in *Maigret voit rouge* and *Grisbi* for instance). Their location in Paris, when known, is always significant. For instance, *Le Manhattan* is in the 17th arrondissement, half-way between Pigalle and the sleazy side of the Arc de Triomphe, home of louche bars and the higher end of prostitution. Pigalle features very prominently indeed in many French *policiers* (*Grisbi* and *Bob le flambeur*). With Montmartre (and Barbès in the 1970s and 1980s), it is a privileged location, for veracity purposes, but also because it encapsulates the mingling of the working and criminal classes which goes right back to *Les Mystères de Paris*. *Bob le flambeur* makes the point explicitly in its title sequence, when the camera starts from the idyllic rooftops of Montmartre (and the Sacré-Coeur church) to descend to the 'hell' of Pigalle, accompanied by Melville's voice over. It is also in Pigalle that many 'American-style' clubs and strip-tease joints are to be found.

It is a rule that in the French *policier*, American or Americanized bars connote decadence and excess, through drugs, drinks and music. But in the same way that American crime is often 'de-Americanized' by being presented as Italian, American 'excess' is presented through black characters. Apart from the obvious racism of this structure, one might comment that this is a way the films find of being anti-American while appearing not to be so. Not coincidentally, in both *Maigret voit rouge* and *Razzia* black faces appear at moments of hysteria or danger. This is usually achieved through the use of jazz bands, as in other, non-*policier*, films of the period: for instance Vadim's *Et Dieu créa la femme* and *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1960). At the same time, accordion music is always present in French *policiers*, often woven into jazz themes – as in the beginning of *Bob le flambeur*, in *Je suis un sentimental*, and many others.⁶⁰ Thus the emphasis on foreignness and otherness in various forms produces, in the end, a reassertion of Frenchness.

This is especially true of divisions among gangsters; we have the 'true' French – characters with names like Henri le Nantais (in

⁶⁰ Adrian Rifkin has analysed how the accordion, from being a minor provincial instrument came in the twentieth century to connote Paris and Frenchness in *Street noises* (London: Verso, forthcoming).



The Frenchman and the 'other':
Jean Gabin as Max (right) and
Lino Ventura as Angelo in
Toucher pas au Grisbi
(courtesy of Rober Droits
Audiovisuels).



The Frenchman and the 'other':
Razzia sur la chnouf.

Razzia), and those on the margins: Italians, Corsicans, or Catalans (the Lino Ventura characters in *Razzia*, *Grisbi*, *Le Rouge est mis*, and others); names like Fredo, Angelo, Pozzo, Pepito, abound (the Italian coproductions must have come in handy). *Razzia*, under the cover of showing who drug users and peddlers are, is a veritable catalogue of 'marginals': women (who seem to be almost the only drug users), homosexuals (a caricatural gay couple, an equally caricatural butch nightclub manageress), Chinese (opium users), and African and West Indian blacks (marijuana smokers). These are literally lined up against a wall by the Gabin character, who, having pretended to be a high-flying drug baron, is revealed at the end to be a top inspector with the drugs squad of the French police, though importantly one who has learnt the tricks of the trade in the USA.

From these examples, I would argue that Americanness – true to the ambiguity of the Franco-American relations – functions as a cipher which is used in the *policier* in many different, fluctuating, and often contradictory ways. Americanness can be 'negative', and help prove the superiority of the French police, the innate goodness of French values (in *Razzia*, drugs are only in France in transit, and are used by 'marginals'; the man who loads it onto the boat is black), or more generally to show up the value of French products to a popular French audience. Gabin's opinion of whisky as 'medicinal' was, and still is, a widespread opinion in French working-class milieux. But it can also be used positively, to connote 'the good life', the tastes associated with the US are those of the upper middle classes in the 1950s and early 1960s: drinking exotic spirits, driving large cars, going to expensive night clubs playing jazz music, living in the elegant areas of Paris. For instance in *Razzia*, a raid on The Manhattan is the occasion for a display of gangster paraphernalia (guns mostly) and the luxury American atmosphere supported by jazz music. In addition, the resort of Deauville, golf courses, properties in Normandy and generally the wealthy western suburbs of Paris, all figure largely in the French *policier* as associated with American figures (*Razzia*, *Maigret voit rouge*, *Bob le flambeur*, *Grisbi*). Ironically they were also part and parcel of the well-publicized lifestyle of film stars such as Jean Gabin and Eddie Constantine, who both possessed large properties in Normandy with stables full of race horses.

As we have seen 'Americanness' was used to contrast with the marginality of 'non (white heterosexual male) Frenchness', and thus in the process reasserted the latter. I have also mentioned the use, as emblems of Frenchness, of Paris and language. A third important term in this respect was actors. Jean Gabin, for instance, was a crucial figure of 1950s and 1960s *policiers*, giving the films, through his accumulated star persona a French anchorage, even when playing American-style gangsters (*Razzia*, *Grisbi*). More ambiguous

was the use of Eddie Constantine, an American actor who became a 'French' star.

The flexibility and ambiguity of the sign of Americanness outlined above are at the core of the Lemmy Caution character, based on Peter Cheyney's novels. As an American actor who made it in French films, Eddie Constantine, the creator of the character, is an exceptional case. Born in 1917 and originally trained as a classical singer, he came to France in 1947. Edith Piaf, whose *protégé* he became, encouraged him to develop his repertoire in a popular mode, and wrote songs for him; his film career in France was supported by song recordings and in one of his few non-thriller films, *Folies-Bergère*, he is a singer.



American-style night life:
Eddie Constantine in *Ça va barder*.

Though he made over forty films in France between the early 1950s and the late 1960s, it is the Lemmy Caution films of the 1950s which fixed the persona and ensured his immense popularity – in particular *La Môme vert-de-gris* (1952), *Cet homme est dangereux*, *Les Femmes s'en balancent* and *Ça va barder*. *Je suis un sentimental* features a different character, the reporter Barney Morgan, but the character is the same in all but name, combining all the key characteristics of Lemmy Caution, a private dick in the Marlowe tradition (there are similarities between Constantine's physique and Bogart's, except in terms of height): he is independent, tough, keen on hard drinks, but because of the different censorship codes between France and Hollywood, there is a greater emphasis on women. Constantine is also credited with importing a high degree of humour into the genre. This is undoubtedly true, but beyond humour, there is also in Constantine's performance as Lemmy Caution a self-parodic, non-realistic dimension, akin to strip-cartoons, which clearly appealed to Godard. For instance, in *Je suis un sentimental*, a scene shows Barney Morgan drinking twelve whiskys in a row supposedly to prove that something he saw when totally drunk (a vital clue in the mystery) was indeed there; the scene however has no real narrative function, it simply serves as ironic quotation of his star image.



The 'domesticated American':
Eddie Constantine (left) and
Jean-Luc Godard in *Alphaville*
(courtesy of Rober Droits
Audiovisuels).

Constantine's appeal also had to do with his embodiment of 'positive' American values, made acceptable to a popular French audience by his 'domestication', in other words his representation of American culture in 'dubbed version'. This is principally achieved through language. Constantine's speech merges a strong American accent with the *Série noire* type of Parisian slang, contributing both to his humour and his anchorage in French popular culture. This makes it possible then for the films to explore 'French corruption' without being anti-French. In *Je suis un sentimental* the corruption is located within the margins of French society: the decadent aristocracy⁶¹ (the de Villetterre family who owns the newspaper) and a number of marginals. Righteous values can then rest with

⁶¹ John Berry declared having used *Je suis un sentimental* to 'fight against social corruption', quoted in Guérin, *La Cinéma policier français*, p. 99

Constantine who rescues the wrongly accused 'good' working-class Frenchman.

The 'domesticated' Constantine figure, imported by Godard into *Alphaville*, shows how the cipher of America can be used in very different ways, as I said above, but also how it functioned differently for a popular and a *cinéphile* audience. *Alphaville* is a criticism of the 'modernization' of France which is more romantic and nostalgic than politically trenchant. Its attack against the monstrosity of the big city is undercut by an evocative use of the city at night which, as Georges Sadoul put it, is a very recognizable, almost banal, Paris at night, the same Paris celebrated by so many other French films.⁶² As with all cartoon characters, Lemmy Caution triumphs easily against the rulers of *Alphaville*, but Godard's use of his persona in double quotation marks, as it were, for his own auteurist purposes only worked for his *cinéphile* audience. An account of a screening of the film at a popular cinema in Place Clichy (near Pigalle) in Paris, describes how bored the audience – who clearly went in on the strength of Eddie Constantine alone – was, and states: 'the audience suddenly feels liberated and relieved, at the exact second when Lemmy Caution rebels against Alpha 60 and, instead of aping Oedipus, plays the tough bruiser and interprets "a new adventure of Lemmy Caution" . . . the audience finally hooks back on to the [Lemmy Caution] series. Lemmy Caution saves the beautiful Natascha' happy end.'⁶³ If Godard wanted his film to address the 'two audiences', the *cinéphile* and the popular one, as he had done in *A Bout de souffle*, he was less successful in this case, because the two audiences had drifted much further apart between 1959 and 1965, and because the popular one had begun to dwindle anyway. As Eddie Constantine put it,

We made [*Alphaville*] to kill the character. It was Lemmy projected into a future world with which he was unable to cope. And we succeeded all too well. I never worked again in French films . . . *Alphaville* destroyed the myth of Lemmy Caution for the French. The people who believed in me were suddenly told not to believe. I didn't know it then, but it was an end of career.⁶⁴

The Constantine–Lemmy Caution persona, though made from an amalgam of American and British material, was a French creation, for a popular French audience. It is thus not surprising that, as *Hollywood reporter* put it, 'like a good wine it didn't export very well'.⁶⁵ How much this was true is shown by the fact that in his first American film, *Raid on Entebbe* (1976), Constantine had to play a French pilot

This paper is an abridged version of work delivered at the July 1991 BFI summer school *Borderlines* at the University of Stirling. I wish to thank Jim Cook for inviting me to take part in it.

⁶² Georges Sadoul, 'look at *Alphaville*, and you will recognize Paris', quoted in Sadoul 'Jean-Luc à la recherche de l'humain', *Miroir du Cinéma*, supplément nos 12–13

⁶³ *Miroir du cinéma* supplément p. 10

⁶⁴ Interview with Eddie Constantine, *Hollywood Reporter* 23 September 1977, p. 12

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 12

reports and debates

The mediascape of modern Southeast Asia

ANNETTE HAMILTON

In the United Kingdom and the USA what little attention is currently directed towards Asian media seldom touches on the nations of Southeast Asia. For western scholars, 'Asia' is generally encompassed by India on the one hand, and China and Japan on the other. For film scholars in particular, the 'new wave' of filmmaking in pre-Tiananmen mainland China, and more recently its counterpart in Taiwan, seems to provide exciting and novel developments which attract the western theorist and critic both ideologically and stylistically. Japanese film has of course long been central to an 'Asian' perspective for western scholars, especially through the 'classic' auteur filmmakers such as Kurosawa and Oshima. Seldom is film placed in a broader media and popular-culture context, and even more infrequently is it approached through a sociopolitical framework, either in terms of production or reception.

Here I will offer only a sketchy overview of the visual media in the complex setting of modern Southeast Asia; the difficulties of generalization across a region of such cultural, ethnic, religious and political diversity are substantial, and a proper account would require a large volume and a substantial bibliography, quite beyond the scope of the present paper. However one generalization is indisputable: it is impossible to understand media and cultural expression in the region without recognizing the central role of the state.

The ideologies, philosophies and goals of the modern nation states of Southeast Asia have been shaped substantially by their recent

historical development. The competing western colonialisms in the nineteenth century, and the forms of decolonization in the twentieth, have produced a mosaic of power, economic structures, systems of communication, and attitudes to the West which profoundly affect both the extension of media services and the dominant forms of media production. Crudely, there are two camps in modern Southeast Asia: the socialist and communist states of Burma (Myanmar), Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and the capitalist states of Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines. Each of these had a distinctive colonization history: the French in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia; the British in Burma, Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia, the Spanish and then the Americans in the Philippines. Thailand, the only state not to have been colonized, was nonetheless profoundly affected by the British models of administration and more recently by pro-American policies, especially as a consequence of the Vietnam war. Today, the differences between the two groups are dramatic: the socialist/communist camp is desperately poor, with an undeveloped infrastructure and dual economies (state and black-market), while the capitalist camp is either highly industrialized and internationally successful (Singapore being the most so, with Thailand a close second) or moving rapidly in that direction (Malaysia and Indonesia). Only the Philippines remains refractory, in many respects more like a South American state than a Southeast Asian one.

Of course this depiction is oversimplified and omits much. Descriptions in terms of 'states' obscure the vast internal differentiation in such nations. For instance, along the mountainous borders of several states are regions which are effectively outside the control of any state, in spite of constant efforts in that direction. The opium warlords, such as Khun Sa, whose base is in Burma, operate freely throughout their territories, and often assert that their activities are in the interests of 'national liberation' for the ethnic minorities in the area. Apart from this, and in spite of the official state commitments to an ideology of 'national unity', within each state are substantial numbers of religious and ethnic minorities, including Muslims, Chinese, indigenous 'tribal' or 'aboriginal' groups, and Christians, to name a few. It is against the conflicts, fissions and potential threats to the unity of each state that the role of media and broadcasting generally must be placed.¹

As might be expected the capitalist camp has a highly developed media environment. This has in no case emerged out of a 'free market' or competitive commercial situation. On the contrary, the states concerned have been instrumental in fostering media development in accord with their own intentions and interests. In Indonesia, for instance, the mass media have been explicitly viewed as the single most important mechanism for promulgating a vision of

¹ For a recent overview of mass communication policies see John A. Lent 'Mass communications in Asia and the Pacific: recent trends and developments', *Media Asia*, vol 16, no 1 (1989) pp 16-24

'national unity', capable of overcoming the astonishing diversity of this multi-ethnic state which encompasses the heritage of the ancient Kingdoms of Java, the remote tribal hunter-gatherers of Sarawak, and the Melanesian horticulturalists of Irian Jaya.²

Thailand too has seen the mass media as a primary mechanism for 'national development' and ideological conformity. Each of the five capital-city television stations is owned by one department or another of the government – the Army, the Education Department, the Department of Public Relations and so on. Stations and air time are subsequently leased to private enterprise, but the overall control lies squarely within the state. However, the relations between these elaborate bureaucracies are far from stable, they are often in competition with one another, and the political changes at the top (generally brought about by bloodless *coups* reflecting struggles between competing sectors of the military, bureaucratic and business elite) mean a constantly shifting ground of policy and practice.³

In Singapore, television broadcasting is particularly developed in relation to the philosophical and ideological framework of the state. In order to reflect and cater for the multi-ethnic makeup of the population (largely Chinese, but with a substantial Indian component as well as many westerners) there is a careful selection of source programmes, each of which will be subtitled in whichever language is not used on the sound track. Much material is taken from Taiwanese television, in order to reinforce the state's official 'Mandarinization' language policy, but since most Singaporean residents do not speak Mandarin these programmes will also be subtitled in Chinese script. A substantial component of western, especially American, material is also screened, but this is carefully chosen. Innocuous American family shows are the most frequently screened.⁴

In Malaysia, with its commitment to ethnic Malay nationalism and Islam as the state religion, the nature of television programming is equally important. Rather than using the vast quantity of Chinese-origin material, so common in Thailand and Singapore, there is much more local programming, along with selected shows from the Middle East. 'Commercial' breaks are used to promulgate elaborately staged images of the unity of the state, showing national parades and other events often set to disco-rhythmed tunes sung by popular singers.⁵

In the Philippines, by contrast, a very high percentage of broadcast material is American in origin. Since English is widely spoken and understood, the expense of dubbing or subtitling is unnecessary and there is relatively less broadcast material of Chinese or other Asian origin, except for internationally received 'action' films. However, internal fractures, the presence of dissident minorities, and the extreme disparities in poverty and wealth, renders the question of 'national unity' problematic here too. The

2 See for example S K Ishadi 'TV broadcasting in Indonesia', in *Satellite Technology: The Communication Equalizer* (Singapore: Asian Mass Communication and Information Centre, 1985)

3 For an account of policies (but not the politics behind them) see Sethaporn Cusripituck et al *Communication Policies in Thailand: A Study Report* (Bangkok: UNESCO, 1985)

4 See for example Eddy Kuo and Peter Chen, *Communication Policy and Planning in Singapore* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983)

5 See S A Idid and L Fawanteh, 'Media ethnicity and national unity: a Malaysian report' *Media Asia*, vol 16, no 2 (1989) pp 78–85

6 See I. Gonzalez 'Media, ethnicity and national unity: a Philippine report' *ibid.* pp. 71-7

lack of electrification and the poverty in many parts of the country makes television and film viewing far less common than is the case in the other 'capitalist' nations.⁶

The impact of mass media, especially television, largely depends on the availability of electricity. Most of the Southeast Asian states have an explicit commitment to electricity extension as part of their 'modernization' strategies. While coverage differs according to geographical factors and remoteness, in general most of the populations in these states have at least some access to television, while in some, such as Thailand, up to eighty-five per cent of people now own a television set or have ready access to one.

As well as television services, there are also extensive radio broadcasting facilities and a high per capita distribution of newspapers and magazines. These media too are subject to different degrees of state control, through censorship and self-censorship, and are all to some extent utilized to spread 'information', in part government propaganda. The situation with print media in Southeast Asia would take this paper far beyond its limits, and I will not discuss this aspect further.

In summary, then, in the capitalist sectors of Southeast Asia, there is a relatively rich media environment. Consumption of film, television and radio is generally high wherever resources are available. However, through a variety of formal and semi-formal mechanisms, and through the structures of ownership and control, most of the institutionalized media are to a significant extent under direct government control.

Not surprisingly, the degree of official control over media in the socialist states is even higher. However, the extent of media availability is infinitely smaller. Because there has been no commitment to mass electrification programmes, because these states do not manufacture television receivers, and have little or no available funds to import them, television is extremely limited both in geographical extent and amount of broadcasting. Radio is much more important, but all radio broadcasts come direct from state sources, and there is no commercial input at all into broadcasting. There are no advertisements, for example, except for state-sponsored programmes, and virtually no local production except for 'news' and public-information services.

The situation with film production, however, is rather different. Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines all have an indigenous commercial film industry, and films made for distribution in cinemas are very often also shown on local television. While there is an immense mass market for film, there are also strong elements of an indigenous 'art' film tradition, with certain filmmakers struggling against lack of film-stock, difficulties of production, lack of training and lack of commercial outlets to produce films which speak to concerns generally obscured by the official broadcast media. The

market for these films is increasingly centred among the more educated rising bourgeoisie, government servants, educators and the intelligentsia. But even purely 'commercial' films, made solely for profit by local film-production companies, can provide powerful avenues for indirect social criticism as well as giving interpretations of contemporary events and experience which are highly valued in the local setting. While imported films are also popular in all these states, especially American war films, and films of super-heroes such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, the appetite for local film is nonetheless substantial and enduring. Also, imported film from China (Hong Kong gangster films and historical/mythological romances) is important in Thailand, while films from Muslim countries are popular in Indonesia and Malaysia.

In the socialist sector, very little is known about indigenous filmmaking. There is a growing film industry in Vietnam,⁷ and there was certainly a very important local film industry in Burma at least up until the events of 1988. Huge billboards advertised the current cinematic favourites, and audiences queued for hours to see films screened in the decaying cinema houses of Rangoon. Film-stars made highly publicized retreats to particular monasteries for several months of every year, and cinema provided one of the few outlets for people otherwise restricted to the dreary diet of early 1950s American cartoons and family comedies, and addresses by local dignitaries which formed the staple of the three hours per day of television broadcasting – should they happen to be among the affluent few with access to a television set. In fact television facilities were set up in Burma through a Japanese aid programme and most of the technicians operating the station were Japanese.⁸

One might conclude from all this that the media environment is far from exciting in Southeast Asia today. This would, however, ignore the quite ingenious uses which ordinary people are making of the available resources, and the immense enchantment which visual media hold for people accustomed to an oral and performative, rather than print-oriented, narrative world. The appetite for media has been whetted but hardly satisfied by the available viewing diet. And the desire of the various states to control the viewing habits of their citizens is subverted particularly by new technologies which are readily able to transgress national boundaries and slip beyond the reach of the clumsy bureaucracies charged with the tasks of surveillance and intervention.

One striking instance is that of video. In Burma in 1987 one of the most important items smuggled into the country from Thailand, in the ceaseless cross-border illegal traffic, was the VCR and video cassette. Virtually unobtainable within the country, except among high party officials, enterprising entrepreneurs nonetheless managed to get machines and sufficient cassettes to provide a local service, at least in some of the provincial towns. In Mandalay small billboards

7 For instance four recent Vietnamese films were shown at the Hawaii International Film Festival in 1989 see *Asian Cinema* vol 5 no 1 (1990) pp 18–19

8 I visited Burma briefly in 1986 and in 1987 and was able to observe and discuss some aspects of media with Burmese scholars whom I had previously known in Australia

went up outside houses, and the public paid a fee to enter and watch whatever had been procured. Far and away the most popular were American films of any type at all, but Thai films were keenly enjoyed along with some Chinese 'action' movies. While it was obvious these could only have been obtained on the black market, there nonetheless seemed at that time to be a degree of tolerance, a 'blind eye', on the part of local police and officials. People enthusiastically discussed any western films they had seen with visiting foreigners, asking for interpretations in terms of their understanding of western society and economic practices. The advertisements which appeared on these cassettes (many of which had been copied directly from Thai television broadcasts) offered images of the world of consumption, so alluring yet so unobtainable in the non-import economy. There was an implicit hierarchy of value in terms of foreign products: American or English were the best, Thai came a good second, and Chinese next – a hierarchy of preference most visible on the black market. It seems likely that the circulation of video, together with the impact of increased tourism, were significantly involved in the upsurge of anti-government sentiment culminating in the events of 1988.

In Thailand, where average incomes are much higher and access to consumer goods so much easier, the VCR has penetrated the country with amazing rapidity. In cities and provincial towns, the VCR is, one way or another, available to everyone. In the capital, Bangkok, banks of huge video-screens are set up at the main video outlets in the burgeoning shopping malls, frequented by all kinds of local people, many of whom spend the day in the air-conditioned comfort and ceaselessly exciting environment without buying anything. These video displays will show four or five programmes simultaneously: the latest Madonna video; a keep-fit programme, Japanese video-graphic programmes; a currently popular American movie; a Chinese sword-play drama. Groups of viewers knot around these displays, on average watching for fifteen minutes or so before passing on. The stores themselves are thronged with shoppers who are buying or renting videos, which are listed in a fully illustrated photo-album sized book for ready choice. In many malls there are cinemas showing first releases, but there are also many video mini-theatres where, for a much cheaper price, viewers can watch videos on a large screen in a cinema-like environment.⁹

While most of those viewing in the capital are relatively affluent, video is not denied to the small-town and rural population. Shopkeepers and stall-holders in markets frequently provide a television set and VCR for their customers who are welcome to sit, or stand around, and watch as long as they like. Most long-distance buses (which provide the most important and cheapest form of interprovincial transport) are equipped with a video and the passengers are offered a diet of local comedy shows taped off

⁹ See Annette Hamilton 'The Bangkok shopping mall', forthcoming in *Public Culture*

television broadcasts, as well as the widest variety of Chinese and western films. As in Burma, enterprising local families may make a small business for themselves after the purchase of a VCR. In the small town where I worked, one family set up a regular viewing programme in their downstairs room, which opened out onto two laneways. They took requests from their neighbours for favourite programmes and put up a notice indicating the programme for Friday and Saturday nights. Thirty or forty people would gather; those who couldn't find a seat brought their own stool and sat in the laneway. The family sold sweets, soft drinks and cakes, while women with mobile noodle carts and banana-frying stands wheeled up and took orders. Many of the people in this town were of Chinese origin, and Chinese historical dramas were especially popular.

Even in the much more remote rural areas, including those few border zones without access to electricity, both film and video are available. 'Medicine shows' tour the provinces screening selected films in temple courtyards or market-places, especially during festival and holiday periods (the king's birthday, new year celebrations, of which there are three each year – the western, the Chinese and the Thai – and other nationally important occasions). These are private-enterprise companies: a group of six or seven employees of the parent company travel around a regular route in the countryside with a mobile screen and projector, and show three films per session (one Chinese, one Thai, one western); during the lengthy intervals they exhort the viewers to buy medicine and other goods. Again, mobile food-vendors come and set up stalls in the viewing area, and a general air of festivity prevails. There is no charge for watching these films, and on very important occasions there may be three or more programmes showing simultaneously in large public spaces. With the arrival of the VCR, a rather different mobile enterprise has sprung up, equipped with a small truck, a low-sound generator, a large monitor and an amplifier, the video-man arrives in the remotest villages, sets up his equipment, and charges a small viewing fee. Of course people prefer to have their own VCR where possible, and an extended family group or a group of neighbours may club together to purchase one where electricity is connected. Hence the common sight of a large bright coloured screen showing *Rambo* or *The Terminator* glimpsed through the doors of a small bamboo hut.

The enthusiasm for videos of course raises the problem of supply. Until early 1990 there was no real attempt to control video (or audiotape, or computer-software) piracy in Thailand: indeed, when the first efforts to stop piracy were made (at the instigation of the United States and the transnational production and distribution companies) many Thai people protested that copyright was completely inappropriate for Thailand and raised many complex

10 See Annette Hamilton 'Video crackdown or, the sacrificial pirate' Second Asian Cinema Studies Conference Melbourne, 1990

philosophical and economic arguments to support their views.¹⁰ Up until this time, however, it was not uncommon for first-release international movies to be available in provincial video stores before being released in the capital. People would arrange for associates in Hong Kong, for instance, to forward pirated masters through the mail, and then duplicate them by the thousand for supply to the tens of thousands of video outlets around the country. In some cases people made videos themselves in the cinemas of first-release films and then distributed them. The quality, often enough, was abysmal, but that did not seem to present an obstacle to so keen a viewing audience.

The use of video in Thailand, however, goes far more deeply into popular culture than merely watching entertaining movies. Now that video-cameras themselves are relatively affordable, a whole industry has sprung up. Local people in small cities and towns learn how to operate a video-recorder and then offer their services at a very reasonable price for a wide range of local events. Among these events are weddings, Buddhist festivals such as the presentation of new robes to monks, house- or business-openings (always presided over by a group of monks who chant and carry out ritual offerings to ensure the prosperity of the householders) and even funerals. One case which I have documented fully elsewhere involved the taping of hours and hours of a spirit-medium possession ceremony by a local woman who was seized by two spirits, a male local district ancestor and, later the same day, by the spirit of Kwan Yin, the Chinese Goddess of Mercy identified with the *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*. The original tapes from this ceremony themselves became sacred objects and were placed on the offering stand during subsequent healing possessions. An edited version was requested by the medium: the cameraman was required to carry this out in a fully ritualized fashion, with appropriate offerings to the spirits to compensate them for interfering with their images, with banks of smoking incense, lotus blossoms, oranges, bottles of whisky and packets of cigarettes set up on an offerings table. The edited version of the tape was duplicated and copies were sent to the medium's relatives all over the country, whereby her fame as a medium was spread, encouraging people from distant parts to attend her possession ceremonies or come for healing.¹¹

11 See Annette Hamilton 'The Goddess of Mercy: Chinese spirit in contemporary Thailand' unpublished, 1989

Videotape has also re-fostered an interest in Indian film and Hindu mythology in provincial areas of Thailand. Indian film was quite popular two decades ago but was eclipsed by Chinese and American film. It no longer has any significant commercial attraction in the capital, but there is a profound local interest, especially in new productions of *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, versions or aspects of which are deeply embedded in Thai popular tales and myths. Video makes it possible for these non-commercially viable tastes and interests to be met. The sixteen-cassette version of *The*

Mahabharata was one of the most popular videos in 1989. There are many other 'serials' or 'sets' of videos available, especially Chinese serials filmed in Hong Kong or Taiwan, and people with access to a VCR can construct quite elaborate viewing programmes for themselves and their families which provide a striking alternative to the often bland diet on national television

Yet another striking aspect of the local media scene in Thailand is the presence of cable television in many small towns. These services are set up by individual entrepreneurs and require official permission from local authorities and perhaps a small 'fee' or 'tea money'. Other than that they are completely independent. The entrepreneur links up subscribers by wires strung from house to house and street to street. Subscription costs are low: around 200 baht (\$US10) per month, not a difficult sum to raise for townsfolk with a number of family members in employment. The local programme starts each evening at around 6.00 p.m. One of the reasons for the popularity of this service is that reception in many regional areas of national television is poor. The local cable station picks up the signals with special equipment and the quality delivered to the home viewer is much higher. However, this is mainly used for the national news, a programme of intense interest to virtually everyone in Thailand. In between, the local station shows a wide variety of materials, including international wrestling and boxing tournaments, local sporting and other events (video-taped by the local cameraman), popular movies 'by request' (viewers can phone in with a film request at any time), interviews with local dignitaries, messages from the Lord Mayor, and any number of other programmes of local interest.

Another result of the spread of new communication technologies has been the impact of satellite services. While these have been largely important in local telecommunications and television transmissions, their presence has broader transregional implications.¹² The impact of satellite technology, especially the spread of dishes capable of receiving signals beamed from outside the state, has become a major issue in the Asian region generally. In India, for example, a consortium of top film and video producers financed by non-resident Indian businessmen is negotiating to lease a satellite transponder from the new Hong Kong based AsiaSat. The cost of leasing – some two million US dollars annually – will be met by advertising by international and transnational companies whose products sell well in the subcontinent.¹³

Similar commercial proposals have been made in Thailand and Indonesia. Thailand began a national satellite-television network between 1977 and 1980, under the control of the Mass Communications Organisation of Thailand (a government body) and since then many other satellite communication programmes have been introduced, all through different government agencies.¹⁴

¹² See *Satellite Technology: The Communication Equaliser*

¹³ *Far Eastern Economic Review* 14 March 1991 pp. 16–17

¹⁴ See Boonlert Supadhlake 'Satellite communication programs in Thailand' *Keio Communication Review* no. 4 (1983) pp. 65–77

¹⁵ See A Dahlan, 'Indonesia's satellite experience: analysis of policy and implementation problems in *Communication Policy Research Workshop* (Honolulu: East-West Centre, 1982), H Harmoko 'National unity and development through satellites' in *Satellite Technology: The Communication Equaliser*

¹⁶ Ramon N Espiritu 'The Philippine domestic satellite communication program', *ibid* pp 129–35

¹⁷ See D Webster, 'Direct broadcasting satellites: proximity, sovereignty and national identity' *Foreign Affairs*, vol 62 no 5 (1984), pp 1161–74

Indonesia has been extremely active in its satellite programme,¹⁵ and a domestic satellite-communications programme has been in place in the Philippines since 1984.¹⁶

However, the most interesting questions arise in relation to direct broadcasting satellites (DBSs), services from which are expected to spring up all over the region in the near future. Already there are anxieties expressed by states over the ability of viewers across national borders to pick up television signals originating from other states. In many parts of north Malaysia, for example, viewers watch Thai television programmes for preference; the same appears to be the case in Laos. Given the tremendous importance placed on control over broadcasting by each state, the issues of sovereignty and national identity will become even more pronounced, especially when the opportunities offered by the Hong Kong based AsiaSat are taken up, as in India.¹⁷ The desire to construct images appropriate to the goals of the state, through the use of national broadcasting services, could be totally subverted by the presence of multiple channels of broadcasting oriented towards transnational rather than national goals. The apparently limitless desire for expanded viewing opportunities among audiences in the Southeast Asian region generally suggests that efforts by states to curb the transnational commercial opportunities offered by new satellite services will come up against the 'free enterprise' global ideology now being espoused throughout many parts of the Asia-Pacific region. It might be supposed that in nations such as Thailand and Indonesia, where English is not spoken or understood to any extent, the impact of such developments will be limited. However, the determination and entrepreneurship already visible all over Southeast Asia in relation to communications technology will no doubt find a way around such obstacles. Already in Thailand voice overs are used for many English or Japanese language programmes (particularly gala shows such as the International Mother–Daughter Beauty Competition and Japanese women's wrestling) and the possibility of re-transmission with simultaneous voice over in Thai is a definite possibility.

Throughout the Southeast Asian region there is an unmet demand for television and film. Rapid adoption of communications technology has meant the proliferation of new kinds of media, for both entertainment and information, in the more developed and affluent sectors, and a desire for access to them in the less developed states. It is likely that efforts by the state to maintain control over what people see, generally for the purposes of maintaining specific ideological images and suppressing dissenting views, are being undercut by the facilities provided by the technology itself, and by the ingenious determination of local people to get the kind of media environment they want.

Many westerners imagine that the television set in the impoverished hut is a mark of, at best, a misconceived development

strategy, and bemoan the effects of advertising and western programmes on 'authentic local culture'. It doesn't take long, in any of these nations, to realize that the desire for television and film is, from a local viewpoint, an extension of a narrative-oral cultural tradition which is incorporating material from a variety of sources according to local needs and preferences. *The Cosby Show* (dubbed in the appropriate local language) takes its place beside *The Mahabharata* and Jacki Chan's latest Hong Kong gangster-comedy epic, along with local melodramas and youth movies. The problem for the western critic, of course, is that these preferences are decidedly 'low culture', and ignore the more refined and intellectual products of the local industries, especially in film. However, the rapid development of a film-literate audience with an internationalized reception capacity is an important factor which should not be underestimated. The average viewer in Thailand or Singapore has been exposed to a much wider range of visual material in style, genre, and cultural code than is the case for any 'average western viewer'). In terms of cultural production, this might offer the possibility of some genuinely new and exciting developments in film and television. It certainly will destabilize the image of 'the West' as the prime determinant for forms of global popular culture, especially as the new generation of Asian film and television producers, writers, camerapeople and actors find a huge regional market opening up to them in the twenty-first century. There are hesitant but definite moves here in Australia to align our cultural destiny with these developments in the Asia-Pacific region, while still maintaining strong ties with European (rather than English) cultural forms. Monoculturalism is, for us, definitely a dead end.

The rapid growth, and the eclectic pattern of demand for film and television in Southeast Asia is just one aspect of the regionalization which is accompanying 'globalization'. Transnational marketing and advertising, satellite communications, the VCR and high-quality low-cost video-recording devices are spreading the power of image and narrative to all parts of the region where 'development' has provided at least some level of affluence and consumption capacity. The long-standing efforts of nation states to control the material reaching their viewing audiences is being subverted on all fronts, and the evolution of a new regional consciousness seems inevitable, especially when 'news', the last bastion of state control, is to some extent internationalized. Nevertheless, the state will not give up easily, especially in relation to its 'image', and the fine line between 'fictional narrative' and 'the real' is not always perceived. Here in Australia diplomatic relations with Malaysia have been seriously damaged by the screening of a multi-part prime-time drama, *Embassy*, on ABC-TV in 1991. Set in a mythical Southeast Asian nation, which is multi-ethnic and Islamic, named Ragaan, the series

centres on the dilemmas, personal relationships and international problems of an Australian diplomatic staff. The Malaysian government seems to be in no doubt that Ragaan is Malaysia, and frosty memoranda have been passing between the governments. Since the programme is made by the national broadcaster, ABC, the Malaysian government takes the depiction to reflect Australian government views on Malaysia. The idea of a 'free' media environment, of 'fictions' which draw on real events, and of television (or film) being permitted to show what its programmers decide, clearly has little purchase. These regional and international issues will be exacerbated as the Asian mediascape frees itself from the state, a situation now possible technologically, if not economically and politically.

Research on media and popular culture in Thailand was carried out for a total of sixteen months between 1986 and 1990, with the support of Macquarie University Research Grants and the Australian Research Council. Work on Thai film and television has continued in Sydney. Brief periods were spent in Burma in 1986 and 1987, and in Singapore in 1990. I wish especially to thank Mrs Tippawan Abold and Mrs Parnee Stoddart for their assistance with translations and interpretations, and Dr Songyot Whaewongse of Silpakorn University (Nakhon Pathom) for his lively conversations about film and culture in Thailand.

report

Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow, 21–3 June 1991

Reporting on the Screen Studies Conference for *Screen* is an exercise with a degree of self-reflexivity which seems somehow appropriate to the occasion. This conference, attended by over one hundred people and addressed by over forty speakers, appeared to function very much as an opportunity to review and to take stock. It picked up some familiar debates, about melodrama or about difference, interrogated some old certainties, particularly about the possibility of a politics of representation; and it tried to imagine possible ways forward in the contemporary pedagogical and political climate. Overall, the conference was marked by a very significant degree of openness, and a perhaps disconcerting lack of controversy.

The opening paper, by Alison Butler, articulated one of the issues which was to dominate discussion at the conference: the theoretical and political implications of a 'return to history'. Butler expressed unease at the extent to which 'history' was being perceived as an unproblematic category within film studies, and at the ways in which it was mobilized against the apparent dominance of theoretical discourses within the discipline. Her argument was that versions of film history are profoundly marked both by the site of their production, and by the theoretical presuppositions of their authors. Her reading of Deleuze's *Cinema* raised fascinating questions of periodization and canon formation, as well as offering an account of the possible institutional and historical contexts of the development of a postmodern intelligentsia.

The turn to history was picked up again in several papers. Connie Balides and Steve Neale were both concerned with 'histories of

discourse'. Balides presented a very interesting reading of filmic representations of 'the housewife' as a negotiation of the spaces of domestic economy, consumerism and sexuality. Steve Neale looked, rather, at the history of discourses within the discipline of film studies itself. His paper considered the concept of 'melodrama' as it has been used in the trade press. He argued that in this context, 'melodrama' did not represent a negative term, but was rather a term used to describe films that were thrilling, sensational or violent. Neale's contention was that the theoretical understanding of 'melodrama' developed in the seventies, and the subsequent attention given to the genre by feminist critics rested on a misunderstanding. Neale's historical research was clearly valued by all who heard the paper, yet there was considerable unease about the relations between such research and the theoretical questions it seemed to license, or to exclude. When Neale went on to say that the association between 'melodrama' and 'women's pictures' was simply wrong, it seemed that the certainties of 'history' were being used to delegitimize what had been a fruitful space of theoretical enquiry.

The concept that particular genres have a theoretical and political importance for women returned in Charlotte Brunsdon's paper. Her focus was on the pedagogical difficulties involved in the analysis of 'women's genres', and her argument was that women students can actually be marginalized or compromised by the insistent ways in which certain texts, and the surrounding critical contexts, foreground femininity. Turning to the work of Donna Haraway and of Teresa de Lauretis, Brunsdon argued that there was a need to theorize femininity as the site of a possible political alliance, rather than as a naturalized explanatory category within cultural studies.

Peter Wollen's paper was also concerned with history, with the collision between the historical and the aesthetic which, he argued,

led to the production of 'a canon' within film studies. His aim was not to challenge the existence of a canon, which he saw as both inevitable for pedagogical reasons and desirable in itself, but rather to analyse the understandings of history and the philosophical underpinnings of aesthetic judgements which led to the privileging of certain films, or of certain genres, at particular moments within the development of film studies. Wollen cited the example of Bazin's advocacy of *Citizen Kane* (1941) and the subsequent centrality of that film to all accounts of the development of cinematic technique. Bazin was in fact challenging Sartre whose critique of *Citizen Kane* focused on the ways that the film negated the possibility of subjective freedom through the use of flashbacks. Bazin, instead, concentrated on technique, and on the freedom this gave to the viewer. Thus a turn from narrative structure to filmic technique shifted the political understanding of this film, and assured its role in the canon as a bridge between silent cinema and the formalism of subsequent art cinemas

Wollen's general argument that the constitution of any sort of theoretical or pedagogical space involves the selection of a textual canon seemed relatively uncontroversial. What did produce substantial disagreement, however, was his apparent normalization of some aspects of 'the aesthetic'. Some films, he argued, are simply better than others, and film theorists do themselves no favours by denying it. This defence of aesthetic values was to constitute the second main issue of the conference, summed up by one speaker's request that we 'separate politics and the aesthetic'.

Wollen's own reasons for demanding such a separation were linked to his own practice as filmmaker, and to his experience as a film viewer. He insisted that at the point of production, and of reception, judgements were formal and qualitative, rather than political. Similarly, Simon Frith argued for a

recognition of the importance of judgements of value for all forms of cultural consumption. His target here was the critical dichotomy which addresses high culture in terms of form but popular culture in terms of its political implications. Both Wollen and Frith suggested the viability and the importance of the concept of 'taste' within cultural studies

In these papers, and the discussions that followed them, there was clearly a significant amount of frustration surrounding what was seen as an impasse within film and cultural studies. The grafting of cultural studies onto an already constituted agenda of the Left was apparently being seen as a bit of a liability. Patricia Mellencamp suggested one possible reason for this when she argued that key conceptual terms had shifted their political meaning over the past decade: her examples were 'consumerism' and 'life-style' which had been taken over as a discourse of the Right. Thus, she argued, inherited terms of analysis may fail to deliver in terms of their original political impulse, and may need to be overhauled. The problem was deeper than this for many speakers, however, and seemed to amount to a desire to bracket the political in the interests of understanding the specificity of different cultural forms. The argument seemed to be that the foregrounding of political questions in cultural studies had led to the short-circuiting of questions of form and of value, and to a consequent limitation on the complexity of cultural analysis.

The discussion surrounding this question remained both tentative and rather general. Feelings ran high, but debates struggled to separate out the different possible levels of analysis appropriate to rethinking the issue. There did seem to be a possibility that frustration over the reductiveness of some attempts to articulate the political with the aesthetic, or over the cultural hierarchy implicit in labelling certain aspects of contemporary culture as sites of primarily

political meaning, would lead to a total repudiation of any politicized discourse within cultural studies. This would be to give up a lot to surrender the arguments, developed in *Screen* over more than a decade, about the ways in which representation can be seen as political, not in terms of its content, or of its social uses, but in terms of the forms of subjectivity with which it engages, the pleasures that it offers, and the versions of history it embodies.

Such issues were clearly still on the agenda for speakers like Tara McPherson, who analysed the representation of the South and the construction of versions of its history in Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1986), for Jane Feuer whose paper on 'the yuppie spectator' set out to explore 'how we [the Left] lost, via television', or, in rather different terms, for Andrew Ross, who argued for the production of 'an ecology of images'.

The possibility of a politicized critical discourse seemed even more crucial for speakers who were dealing mainly with television, where there was no possibility of falling back on an already-constituted aestheticism. Thomas Elsaesser sought to clarify the theoretical questions posed by the specific forms of television in Britain and in the US. He argued that film theory, with its emphasis on the symbolic and on desire, failed to engage with the subjective relations and the economic and political functions of television. Instead, he insisted that 'misrecognition', elsewhere referred to as 'viewer loyalty', was the crucial psychic structure of television. He went on to develop a critique of British television for its imaginary reproductions of sociality and contrasted this with US television's selfconscious staging of its own genres. Elsaesser's paper sought to address what he saw as a 'crisis in television studies', whose origin lay in an excessive dependence on theoretical categories developed for the analysis of film: categories which simply

could not deal with the representational and political strategies of contemporary television.

Patricia Mellencamp also wanted to move the agenda of television studies away from desire. Insisting that 'Are we having fun yet?' was the question of the nineties, she went on to argue that obsession and anxiety, rather than lack or desire, were the dominant psychic structures of contemporary culture. Mellencamp's analysis sought to uncover these structures, and to open out their effects, across a range of contemporary cultural forms. Following Freud, Mellencamp argued that anxiety was the product of the staging of a logic of contradiction, and she cited numerous examples of symbolic structures of creation/cancellation: from economic injunctions to spend/save, and marketing demands to eat/diet, to the constant staging and simultaneous denial of Lucille Ball's unfitness for stardom in *I Love Lucy*.

Mellencamp's reading of this compulsive staging of double binds, and the consequent widespread cultural anxiety, was set alongside a fascinating analysis of the economic logic of monopoly capitalism, with its contradictory practices of standardization and obsessive differentiation. This analysis moved from snack food to television, exploring the effects of deregulation on the production and consumption of televisual images. Overall, it was a compelling paper. The need for television studies to address a much wider theoretical and methodological context, to connect its readings with changes across a range of symbolic and material forms emerged with conviction. At the end of the paper, however, it seemed that there was no position from which to speak. Perhaps overwhelmed by the density of argument, by the range of ideas, few members of the audience were able to articulate a response to Mellencamp's analyses. Instead, after an awkward moment, everyone decided to turn to the television

monitors, which had been silently displaying images of fifties and sixties television shows throughout the paper. Then, in an atmosphere of intense concentration, there

was a shared experience of something which, I think, felt like pleasure.

Morag Shuach

debate

Presumption as theory: 'realism' in television studies

JOHN CORNER

In this note, I want to look at how the hectic history of ideas about television 'realism' has produced a situation whereby the very notion itself is close to being devoid of all useful analytical meaning. Whilst many critics and researchers continue to write as if a coherent theoretical corpus were indicated by the term, in my own teaching of television studies¹ it has increasingly seemed to require diagnosis rather than exposition. Following this, abandonment might turn out to be a better bet than attempted repair.

Realism and debates about its consequences lie close to the centre of 'television theory' (in a poststructuralist universe, an increasingly marooned assembly of ideas, stuck with the awkwardness of being at once more 'social' than cinema studies, more 'aesthetic' than media sociology, yet lacking the critical mass to break free of dependency on both).²

This centrality is not surprising since, of course, arguments about realism have also been central to criticism of cinema and, long before that, of dramatic and literary form.³ Such arguments have a considerable degree of continuity in their concern with two factors – with the *pleasures* of realist forms (on the sources of this pleasure and perhaps on its aesthetic propriety) and with their *knowledge-effects* (involving assessment of their documentary and social analytic potential or, conversely, of their dangerous deceptiveness, whether viewed as naive or strategic). However, a continuity of political/epistemological/aesthetic focus is also accompanied by disjunctions as the move is made from one medium to another. Broadcast television's institutional nature, generic order and modalities of

1 Despite the modest scope of what follows I should like to acknowledge the usefulness of team-teaching a first-year course on television with John Thompson and Kay Richardson, my colleagues and Karen Lury a postgraduate student researching television aesthetics.

2 The status and direction of television theory has been critically commented on by John Caughie in a number of contexts most recently in Adorno's reproach repetition, difference and television genre. *Screen* vol. 32 no. 2 (1991), pp. 127–53.

3 I will mention here just three major source texts from the vast literature: Erich Auerbach's monumental *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1953); Linda Nochlin's *Realism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1971) and Christopher Williams's highly synthesized collection of edited extracts *Realism and the Cinema* (London: Routledge 1980).

viewing pose questions about text-reality relations in ways significantly different from either cinematic or literary forms, and although this difference has been recognized, there has been a failure to take the full measure of it theoretically. Instead, a loose generalism has ruled, by which 'realism' has come to be regarded (often ruefully) as television's defining aesthetic and social project – a view partly resulting from the unmonitored *expansion* of the notion, its proliferation into variants and its incorporation of television's expositional and journalistic forms.

The two issues around which debate has circulated with the most force and confusion might be tagged 'the real and the realistic', and 'realism of form/realism of theme'. Each involves problems of assumption, vagueness and diverse usage

The real and the realistic

Clearly, film and television's capacities to render recorded visual likenesses of the physical world and to move a viewpoint through space mark the distinctive semantics of their 'realism'. They also serve to widen the gap between two different kinds of realist project. These might be called Realism 1 – the project of verisimilitude (of being *like* the real) and Realism 2 – the project of reference (of being *about* the real). In both cases, of course, 'the real' in question is at least partly a normative construction and disputable independently of any media representation. Later I want to discuss the gap between the two projects in terms of the broad categories of form and theme, but under the present heading I will concentrate on Realism 1 because this has been the area with which film and television theories of realism have primarily sought to engage. The aesthetic/technical/perceptual conditions of filmic/televisual verisimilitude and the frequent embedding of the latter in a simulacrum of the *physical* have generated widespread use of the idea that television realism is 'illusory' in effect. And it is with the use of this term that a first, general problem emerges. For debate about realism has often wanted to link an 'illusory' level of depictive form to a broader claim about the effectivity and deceptiveness of the 'knowledge' underlying, informing and conveyed by the depiction, a claim which television's socio-centrality attracts more strongly than cinema. Such a claim essentially assumes a passage from Realism 1 to Realism 2, whereby the seductive mechanisms of the former become the means and the accomplice of faulty understanding.

How can a passage of this kind be conceptualized as social action? Clearly, except for special cases (usually concerning very young children or the first arrival of television in non-modern cultures), viewers do *not* take what they see to be real *rather than* a depiction

What they *may* do is take it to be either a 'straight' imaging of the real (for instance, in news and documentary) thereby blocking questions about the nature of its *construction*, or an 'imaginatively convincing' piece of artifice (in a drama series, play or film), thereby perhaps investing *trust* in the reliability both of portrayed action and any general propositions inferred from the text. But these loose hypotheses, familiar enough in outline, involve a considerable speculative leap, for there has been too little serious attention paid by television studies to what on earth 'illusoriness' might point to in different generic contexts and what its place might be within the inter-dynamics of textuality, (re)cognition and social knowledge

In a recent, illuminating attempt to reconceptualize the forms and processes of television around questions of repetition and difference, John Caughie cites Todorov on verisimilitude.⁴ This quality, says Todorov, is the result of a text's conforming with generic norms in such a manner that it 'produces the *illusion* of realism'. But just how theoretically firm and useful is this statement? Cannot 'realism' be an acknowledged effect whose separation from (and discernible difference from) 'reality' forms part of its appreciation? And, on a slightly different reading, isn't such an awkward usage as the 'illusion of realism' dangerously close to either fusing together the realistic and the real (where, conventionally, the former has been seen as the illusion of the latter) or suggesting by implication the alternative of a 'real realism'? A sound general judgement here is that the idea of 'illusion' is a severely under-thought and over-extended one in television analysis, referring both to willed imaginative play and to deception in a manner which debilitates analysis of the medium's sociality.

Todorov is talking exclusively of fiction, of course. And this connects with a second major problem. For television theory has constituted itself largely by modified borrowings from film theory, where the 'realism' debate has been dominated by attention to the 'classic' realist forms of cinematic fiction. As a result, many contributions to television realist theory have been centred too firmly on the analysis of discrete, visually-led fictions to address television's generic and discursive profusion and its range of non-diegetic (and often speech-led) relations with the 'real' (including those of its journalism).⁵ As I suggested above, what is pointed to in (misguided) talk about the 'realism' of news and current-affairs television, and of interview-based documentary output, is essentially to do with *veracity of reference*, strategically underpinned by *veracities of image and speech*. In drama, it is far more likely to be matters of *verisimilitude* and of *plausibility* which are at stake. The fact of generic mix and generic innovation complicates, but does not yet displace, this basic discursive and epistemic difference

⁴ In Caughie 'Adorno's reproach' p. 146. The quotation is from Tzvetan Todorov *Introduction to Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981) p. 18.

⁵ A recent counter to this tendency is to be found in the essays collected in Paddy Scannell (ed.) *Broadcast Talk* (London: Sage, 1991).

I am arguing, then, that as a way of thinking about television depiction in general, 'realism' is very little more than a collection of begged questions. Even *within* the realm of television drama, however, the homeland of the idea, yet another major point of confusion bedevils usage. Resorting to the most basic terminology, this can be seen as one between realism(s) of form and realism(s) of theme. Realism of form has included conventions of staging, directing, acting, shooting and editing. Realism of theme obviously connects with the normative plausibility of characterization, circumstance and action as well as being shaped within particular national and political pressures towards such categories as the 'socially ordinary', or the 'socially problematic' (often prescriptively inflected – what art *ought* to be about). The shift between these two ways of conceiving realism troubles many critical commentaries; producing either a straight conflation, or a tacking to and fro, or a complete ignoring of one side altogether.

Of the two, concern with realism of form has clearly been the dominant strand in the formation of television theory for the reason noted earlier – the influence of film theory. Moreover, this influence was exerted at a time (the mid 1970s) when the ideological consequences of classical Hollywood cinematic form constituted the key focus of a newly emerging radical wing of film studies. The precedents and possibilities of 'anti-realism(s)' (drawing extensively on literary and theatrical parallels) was central to the cinematic debate.⁶ However, in Britain, the use of documentary conventions in social or historical television drama gave rise to concurrent arguments of a rather different kind; about 'progressive realism'. Formally, such 'progressiveness' was seen to be a function of a work's ability to open up at least *some* space for a critically distanced viewing within the larger framings of narrative continuity, even if these framings were not themselves brought into explicit question in the manner that cinematic radicalism recommended. What is interesting for my present argument is the extent to which this sub-debate⁷ (of great significance within the development of television theory) involved the 'leaking-in' of positive ideas about 'realism of theme' as a counterpoint to negative ones about 'realism of form'. For nearly all of the British television dramas upon which discussion centred (the four-part series *Days of Hope*, screened by the BBC in 1975, attaining canonical status in this respect) depicted historical or contemporary events involving the politicization of experience within the British working class. This thematic (and publicly controversial) link between television representation and social and political realities needed to be addressed within a different analytic frame from that provided by the study of form, even if finally the two had to be related. Otherwise, the issue of

6 Among the critical overviews of this period, centrally involving *Screen*, is that to be found in Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake (eds) *Film Theory: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

7 The widely-cited exchange of views between Colin McCabe and Colin MacArthur provided an 'official' core to the debate. The relevant pieces, first published in *Screen* during 1975–6 and in the *Edinburgh TV Festival Magazine* 1977, are collected in edited form in Tony Bennett et al (eds), *Popular Television and Film* (London: British Film Institute/Open University Press, 1981), pp. 305–18. Raymond Williams's 'A lecture on realism', *Screen* vol. 18, no. 1 (1977), first delivered as a SEFT conference paper the previous year, was also influential. Though its overall conceptual scheme lacks sharpness, it is more comprehensively mindful of the political and aesthetic confusions attending debates about realism than most contemporary interventions.

'reference' would be completely displaced by that of 'signification' – as often happened. An overblown notion of realism (partly parasitic on an overblown and increasingly mystical concept of ideology) acted as a block to any more incisive conceptualization.⁸

⁸ Terry Lovell's *Pictures of Reality* (London: British Film Institute, 1980) is a brilliantly suggestive account of this and related problems as they featured in British cultural studies at the end of the 1970s. Part of its originality lies in the way it is able to draw comparatively on the use made of 'realism' as a concept in sociological theory.

Realism and the popular: genre and audience

In any account of 'realism's' troublesome career within cultural analysis, the long-standing, problematic relationship which the term has with 'naturalism' figures as an important sub-plot. In television criticism, both scholarly and journalistic, the two terms are routinely employed as synonyms, albeit with connotative nuances, though attempts are sometimes made to specify differentiation, and even contrast. 'Soft' versions of this make naturalism a kind of 'hi-fi' realism, as indicated above, whereas 'hard' versions tend to pick up on an influential strand of earlier socio-literary theory (particularly Lukacs)⁹ in distinguishing between a concern with physical detail and spatial and temporal norms on the one hand, and, on the other hand, a broader analytic, penetrative concern for essential 'truth'. Here again, we can see how that cruder division – between form and theme – seems always to be lurking suggestively in the background even where the explicit theorization is more agile and ambitious.

With this in mind, I want to close with a reference to what seems to me to be the boldest recent attempt to clarify realism for television analysis. This is the one to be found in Chapter 1 of Ien Ang's *Watching Dallas*.¹⁰ Ang's commentary is driven by a 'demand-side' proposition, based on data from a viewer survey, that a central part of the pleasure which people take from *Dallas* (CBS/Lorimar, 1978–) is somehow derived from attributions of realism. The key question then becomes 'How does this attribution come to be made?' But having first posed realism as the key principle of television's popular aesthetic (an inductive move which a longer consideration of the book would do well to question). Ang proceeds to discuss both 'empirical realism' (likeness of setting, social action and ostensible theme) and 'classical realism' (formal conventions), only to find them both inadequate as explanations. It is finally 'emotional realism' (deep-level resonances with the emotional organization of the viewer) which turns out to link text and experience in a way which fits the data. That this pioneering and conceptually reflexive study should find it necessary to stretch to a version of realism so rarified and disjunct from any formal or thematic criteria (and so uncertainly positioned in relation to that grand old non-realist idea, 'escapism') seems to me to be yet further evidence of the difficulties outlined above.

I have sketched out a view of 'realism' as a notion whose

⁹ Ernst Bloch et al (eds), *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: New Left Books, 1978) contains key extracts from Brecht, Lukacs, Adorno and Benjamin in a selection of 'debate pieces' whose reprinting provided an important stimulation and resource for literary and media studies argument.

¹⁰ Ien Ang, *Watching Dallas* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), pp 13–50.

uncertainties have worked against clarity and development in television studies. These uncertainties principally concern questions about the psychological and epistemological character of the realist 'illusion', about the relation of fictional narratives to other dominant forms of television, and about the relation of forms to themes. We can be sure that *whatever* gets called 'realism' will be subject to historical and social contingency in respect of its formal conventions, its thematic choices and also those 'realities' against which both are appraised. But this does not exonerate us from the present requirement to think ourselves out of a mess.

reviews

review article:

Noël Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, translated and edited by Ben Brewster. London: BFI Publishing, 1990, 317pp.

Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (eds), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*. London: BFI Publishing, 1990, 424pp.

Early Cinema: Primitives and Pioneers. London: British Film Institute, 1990 (two videotapes of early British, French and American films [1895–1910], 70 and 105 minutes).

NORMAN KING

In their very different ways, these two books (and for other reasons the two videotapes) are indicative of the radical changes which have taken place in the study of early cinema since the late 1970s. It was still possible for a William Everson to claim in 1978 that you could find out all you really needed to know about early American cinema by looking at a few of Porter's Edison and Griffith's Biograph films. Meanwhile there were Everson's European counterparts who were still swearing by Lumière and Méliès as the founding instances of a universal phenomenon, separating out definitively the documentary and the fictional (let there be Lumière and let the devilish Méliès keep the best stories). No one would now pay much attention to these neat oversimplifications except as convenient aunt sallies for essay questions.

1978 might in this respect seem to be a watershed. Both *Life to those Shadows* and *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* cite the Brighton FIAF conference held in that year as a first conjunction of academic and archival interests. Whether or not that is an accurate view – Henry Langlois and Jean Mitry were not alone in their much

earlier efforts to save, exhibit, catalogue and analyse rare silent films – the Brighton conference did in its way signal a new departure in the historiography of film. Archive research on early cinema was revalorized. Detailed comparisons of prints, copies, remakes and imitations became legitimate objects of study, along with the close scrutiny of producers' sale and rental catalogues. And since then a thriving industry, led jointly by empirical researchers and archivists, has massively expanded our knowledge of how early cinema functioned: see, for example, the first two volumes of the new Maxwell Macmillan *History of the American Cinema* (1991) – edited by an academic (Charles Musser [vol. 1]) and an archivist (Eileen Bowser [vol. 2]) – which have eleven hundred pages on cinema up to 1915.

What has often been at stake, though, in this post-1978 revivalist movement is the establishment of a morphology of film, providing a set of credentials for a new discipline in the way mediaevalists did for literary studies in the nineteenth century. *Birth of a Nation* (1915) was already being celebrated as cinema's *Chanson de Roland* in the late 1920s. What has happened recently is characterized by a more pressing search for origins, valorized – and justified – by a new antiquarianism in the quest for what prepared the way for that first great national epic. Film has by modern standards a long history. It is, as Thomas Elsaesser stresses in the first sentence of his editorial introduction to *Early Cinema. Space, Frame, Narrative*, approaching its centenary. And he goes on to discuss 'the quantum leap taken by the audio-visual media not just as entertainment, but in public life, politics, education and science [which also alert] us to the historical role of cinema in the more general transformation of the ways knowledge is stored and disseminated, social experience is recorded and subjectively constructed' Elsaesser's approach is thus an archaeological one: his collection 'wants to be a cultural archaeology of the new medium' (p. 1), while recognizing that only fragments of cinema's early history have survived.

Elsaesser understandably cites Noel Burch as one of his two predecessors in this field (the other being Michael Chanan). But this seems too neat a way of establishing an ancestry. Elsaesser cannot justifiably uphold this notion of a triumvirate which appears to have made no significant contribution to that conservation of old films and decaying archives without which an archaeology of cinema would be impossible. Burch in particular might have been more modest in this respect. His introduction to *Life to those Shadows* is full of 'I's, with no credit at all to the people who made his work on archive prints possible. Instead, he drops prestigious names of persons and journals – Godard, Straub, Metz, *Cinéthèque* and *Tel quel* as focus for his *thought*, as if the material support for his writings and lectures could be taken for granted.

Noel Burch's work on early cinema is of course already widely known – through articles in *Screen*, *Afterimage*, *Iris* and *Communications*, through his film *Correction Please* (Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979), and through his television programmes for Channel Four. It deserves to be widely respected. But it is also controversial, inviting challenge as much as admiration for a methodology which is at once careful (in the study of archive prints) and uncomfortably carefree in its attempt to construct a unified theory of film practice. His assertion that the period between 1895 and 1929 saw the gradual constitution of an Institutional Mode of Representation (IMR) which, developing out of a Primitive Mode of Representation (PMR), became the dominant form from then on shunts so much of cinema's complex history into the sidings – not just the various avant gardes which Burch belatedly tries to recuperate, but also mainstream politicized practices which do not conform to his monolithic model

Burch's contention that *Life to those Shadows* is intended to explain that 'the "language" of cinema is in no way natural . . . that it has a history and is a product of History' (p. 2) comes across today as somewhat self-evident, inviting a response of the kind: 'Yes, of course, but we know that and we have moved on.' It embodies a sense of history which comes close to falling into the nineteenth-century mediaevalist trap, resurrecting 'primitive' modes of representation in order to demonstrate how popular forms were gradually transformed into modes that would be appropriated by rampant bourgeois capitalists who had no soul. That was an elitist, romantic argument then, and it still is

What, after all, is the 'bourgeois mode of representation' argument about? Is it really providing a materialist theory of film practice, or is the Institutional Mode of Representation just a convenient grammar of filmmaking – a morphology which encompasses the shift from full shot to medium-close, to closeups and to field/reverse-field used to punctuate those master shots which continue to be dominant in an epoch of postmodern technology? And what does 'bourgeois' mean in this context? Are we talking about the icy waters of calculating self-interest, which would apply just as much to Burch's 'primitives', or to the gradual discovery of visual pleasures which were there to be enjoyed and appropriated by populists, for example, and by radicals? Of course Burch is right when he suggests that cinema had great difficulties in discovering its own language, but that does not necessarily make his Institutional Mode of Representation a bourgeois form.

He might, in this respect, have chosen a more sophisticated schema, even if this had involved recourse to another model with nineteenth-century origins: the art historian's distinction between a primitive multiplicity of spaces, the classical as enclosed mode of representation, the realist as a dominant (political, sentimental and

ironic) bourgeois form, and the popular which in a mercantile world played on all three. These distinctions may not apply in quite the same way to cinema as commodity from the outset, but they might help to modify Burch's agenda, especially with regard to that ironic distance which emerges from within constrained forms, and without which a 'bourgeois' mode of representation would be of no great interest. The composition in depth, long takes and continuity cutting of 'classical' cinema may appear to be a naturalizing process, but in fact they often exhibit a lack of power over the look, offering the possibility of a distanced spectator position within a narrative. That is indeed distinctive and may be the mark of Burch's IMR, if it is considered as discontinuity/disengagement and not just as a seamless post-primitive world of concealment and invisibility. Even within the mainstream there are as many exceptions to Burch's 'rules' as there are conformities.

There is also a problem with Burch's definition of the Primitive Mode of Representation. Does it exist or doesn't it? He would like to have it both ways – yes there is a PMR, and no there isn't. The argument is in any case teleological, since his project is to indicate a selection process which starts and ends with the present, to explain the past as if there had been a natural bourgeois process of selection. Even Darwin, as a *bourgeois* materialist, would not quite have gone along with this. Constructing a history of continuity cinema may not be as easy as working up a theory of the survival of the fittest, but it becomes even more difficult if you start out with an imaginary monolith that you have to deconstruct and rebuild at the same time.

A further difficulty is that Burch falls into some wide-open traps, as when he claims that silent film strategies died with the arrival of sound. This is so clearly not the case that one wonders whether he has simply overlooked mid 1930s films – not Chaplin, who was unduly recalcitrant; nor the Soviets, who did not have all the equipment they would have liked; but mainstream Hollywood, Clarence Brown for example, who gloried, along with so many other directors, in the amazing potential of shooting silent with the latest sophisticated cameras and dubbing a soundtrack later. Has Burch enjoyed the pleasures of *Anna Karenina*, whether he approves of the film or not? If you want to describe an Institutional Mode of Representation, why go back to origins without also taking account of such wonderful 'classical' material?

There is of course always a temptation to think yourself back into the past, to come up with truths about times and conditions gone by, but, as we know, answers can only ever be tentative. As structuralists have been telling us for a long time, true meanings are not available to us. Burch's question in his television series *What Do Those Old Films Mean?* (Channel Four, 1986) is in this respect tantalizing but unanswerable. Neither he nor anyone else has a

convenient time machine to take us back to a Lumière programme or a Porter film audience; and, if we did, we probably would not understand the audience's response.

These reticences with regard to Burch's affirmations may be because *Life to those Shadows* is not, strictly speaking, a new book but a collection of pieces written in the late 1970s and early 1980s (the author's introduction indicates 1976 and 1981 as date limits, whereas the conclusion states 1977 and 1985), many of which have been previously published as articles – though they have been revised here. This helps explain why the book seems a bit weary, a belated arrival on a scene that has already been changed. But if some of Burch's arguments may not be entirely convincing, or even very fresh, his work on early cinema cannot easily be dismissed. It invites challenge: you want to read on, even though you would like clearer answers to the questions he raises. And you have to admire Burch's study of early films – his attentiveness, as analyst, critic and filmmaker, to the slow emergence of new strategies. It is just a pity that *Life to those Shadows* was not put together sooner and with more coherence.

Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative has also been a long time in the making – the idea and the title were, its editor says, first conceived in 1982 after an early cinema conference at the University of East Anglia – but its publication is nevertheless punctual, since its contents chart the principal developments in early cinema studies through the 1980s. Thomas Elsaesser remarks in his introduction that it was easy to draw up a list of what texts to include in the collection and painful to decide what to exclude. Perhaps this is *under* protesting too much, since his choices are judicious, avoiding as far as possible texts which have already been anthologized while still managing to be cohesive as well as representative of recent work published in different languages on both sides of the Atlantic. And cohesiveness in an edited collection is neither easy nor self-evident. My one reproach is the omission of a section on the 1920s which had initially been planned.

It is not just the selection of articles which is impressive. Elsaesser is also an excellent analyst. His general and individual introductions are concise, clear and incisive. He is not afraid to challenge some of his contributors' views. Barry Salt, for example, whose article on film form between 1900 and 1906 opens out the agenda, and Noel Burch, whose piece on the Primitive Mode of Representation, first published in *Iris* in 1984 and also, with revisions, in *Life to those Shadows*, is included here. Despite his admiration for Burch's materialist approach, Elsaesser calmly denounces his argument as tautologous.

If *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* does create a problem, it is because the commentaries are so good. They invite the person in a hurry (such as the average undergraduate with too many essays

to write and too many deadlines) to skip the anthologized pieces and rely on the presentations.

The book is also too expensive: at £17.50 in paperback it is beyond the means of most undergraduates, which is frustrating since it would be an excellent prescribed text. Students will not buy it at that price, as I have already discovered. This seems to be a problem the British Film Institute has constructed for itself, since it initially announced a paperback price of about £12 – still expensive for students, but perhaps manageable. If this is a symptom of a shift within the BFI away from books it thought *ought* to be published at accessible prices and towards in-house ephemeral pamphlets, it is a major, and a regrettable, change of policy. It would be sad if *Life to those Shadows* and *Early Cinema Space, Frame, Narrative* marked the end of a distinguished and pedagogically important epoch in BFI publishing history.

In some other respects, though, the British Film Institute has been showing more dynamism in the area of film studies: the *Early Cinema Primitives and Pioneers* videotapes, viewed in conjunction with the two books under review, are major contributions to the study of early cinema.

My initial response to the tapes was that they left a lot to be desired. Could the BFI as a national institution with an international standing not have come up with a more representative selection and some better copies? Looking at them again, I changed my mind. Yes, there are some scratched prints, but there have also been careful efforts to get the image ratio correct and, to the extent that you can, a feasible projection speed (we know that there is no ideal fixed speed for hand-cranked films). Yes, the choice is limited; but it does correspond, within the limits of BFI Distribution's resources, quite well with the needs of early cinema teachers and students. R. W. Paul, G. A. Smith, Bamforth, Haggart, Hepworth and Williamson are all present, along with some little-known publicity documentaries – and Rover does his efficient rescue. The USA is unfortunately represented only via Edison, but the selection does include Porter's *The Gay Shoe Clerk* (1903) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903). For France, there is only one Méliès film – the 1904 *Voyage à travers l'impossible* – which is a pity since there are some beautifully restored colour prints in circulation which are not generally available for hire. The Lumière brothers are, on the other hand, much better represented, with thirteen films dating from 1895 to 1900, and there are some pristine colour prints of Pathé films which look really good on video, especially *Ali Baba et les quarante voleurs* (1905), plus some other Pathé films like *Histoire d'un crime* (1901), *Le cheval emballé* (1907) and *The Physician of the Castle* (1908) which are widely used in early cinema courses. The selection, with its emphasis on Britain and France, may indeed be restricted, but it is on the whole a good one, particularly if we take into

account the difficulties surrounding rights to early films.

The *Primitives and Pioneers* tapes also have a strategic importance, quite apart from any attempt to match up with the Burch and Elsaesser books. They resolve one of the most pressing problems in the teaching of early cinema at a moment when the 16mm market is in a state of crisis. They allow for re-viewing by students of short films which are very hard to remember if projected one after the other. They also make it feasible to organize collaborative projects based on detailed analyses and comparisons. Congratulations, then, in this respect, to the British Film Institute. They say they will produce more videotapes if the demand is there. It clearly should be – and they do invite suggestions. Porter's *The Teddy Bears* would be top of my list (for cinematic as well as political reasons), plus a broader range of early American films. Other proposals should be sent to the BFI Film and Video Library, 21 Stephen Street, London W1P 1PL.

review:

Vève A. Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part One, Signatures (1917–1942)*. New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1984, 514pp.

Vève A. Clark, Millicent Hodson and Catrina Neiman, *The Legend of Maya Deren: Volume 1, Part Two, Chambers (1942–1947)*. New York: Anthology Film Archives/Film Culture, 1988, 684pp.

ALISON BUTLER

In the thirty years since her death in 1961, the films of Maya Deren have acquired the status of founding texts and she herself has become a cult or fetish object, the Mother of US avant-garde film. This has been a strange critical fate – immured in the history of the male-dominated avant garde by a handful of books on experimental cinema, and most particularly by the account of her work given in P. Adams Sitney's *Visionary Film*, Deren's reputation rests largely on her activities as a pioneer, opening the way for others, of new production and distribution practices; and on misreadings of her work as lyrical, marginal and romantic rather than as a powerful transformative moment in the history of cinema's formal and thematic development.

Since the early 1970s, feminist writers and scholars have contested this version of Deren's achievement, re-visioning her as an important precursor to the feminist cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, an explorer of representations of female subjectivity, so way out on a limb in the 1940s that it took several decades for the more startling aspects of her work to be recognized and defended. Initiated at Berkeley in the early 1970s – the moment of publications like *Women and Film*, and of festivals and retrospectives which

sought to uncover hidden traditions of women's cinema and create new ones – *The Legend of Maya Deren* is very much an outgrowth of its time. Its approach is simple and effective: to confront the denial of women's contributions to culture with a mass of information to the contrary, and to extract from the history of those contributions a role model for the present – 'Maya Deren was a model our generation was seeking' (*Signatures*, p. xiv).

Subtitled *A Documentary Biography and Collected Works*, *The Legend of Maya Deren* undertakes an extensive chronological presentation of the filmmaker's published and unpublished articles, correspondence, shooting scripts, photographs and jottings; supplemented with selected reviews of her work, extensive interviews with family, friends and acquaintances, and a range of contextual material. Volume 1, Part One, *Signatures*, covers the period from Deren's birth, as Eleonora Derenkowsky, in the Ukraine in 1917 to her departure to California with Katherine Dunham's dance troupe in 1942. Part Two, *Chambers*, begins with her meeting with Alexander Hammid, who renamed her Maya; and covers their marriage and her first four films, 1942–1947. Two further volumes are planned: *Ritual* (1947–1954), covering the period of Deren's interest in Haitian culture; and *Haiku and Echoes* (1954–1961 and 1961–1982), dealing with the last years of her life and her posthumous influence.

Although some aspects of the approach in *Signatures* have not aged well – particularly the commissioning of Deren's astrological chart to supplement archive material, while others seem ill-judged – for example the inclusion of forty-four of Deren's very ordinary childhood letters to her mother from the Ecole Internationale in Geneva, the overall intention of the authors, to create 'a source book for "everyday use" – a patchwork of corroborations and contradictions' (*Signatures*, p. 4), is made good by the results of their work. The exhaustiveness of *Legend*, its clear presentation and attractive design, including its carefully reproduced primary documents, should encourage new studies and interpretations of Deren's work and provide a powerful corrective to critical commentaries that have emphasized her dynamism as an advocate of experimental cinema at the expense of her originality as a filmmaker and writer.

The documentation of her working processes, from rough notes to complex storyboards and interviews with her collaborators from the 1940s, provides a balanced account of Deren's filmmaking and banishes several critical apocrypha, including the notion that she worked without shooting scripts, and the damaging masculinist insinuation that Deren understated the contribution made to her work by Hammid, who actually says: 'I accepted the fact that I am not an originator of ideas, and that I need someone else to help me.' (*Chambers*, p. 115). Similarly, the reprinting together of her

essays on dance, film and art, and the facsimile reproduction of *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (1946) in *Chambers*, underline the seriousness of her intellectual engagement with film, and if she does not quite emerge as a major theorist, her arguments for her own work as classicist, and against the romantic and realist traditions, are trenchant and convincing. This, more than any text besides the films themselves, stands as evidence that Deren should not be assimilated to the romantic (male) lineage traced by Sitney in *Visionary Film*. Arguing that its unique ability to manipulate the realities of time and space makes cinema the best medium for research in art in the century that discovered relativity (and, it might be added, relativism), Deren locates her own work not as alienated antimodernism but as profoundly modern. Although styled very differently, her ideas about time and space in the cinema are surprisingly close to those more recently formulated by Gilles Deleuze¹ (and perhaps some of the strangeness of her first four films derives from the vigorous exploration of the potentialities of the movement-image, *by a woman*, at the moment of its supposed demise).

¹ See the review of Deleuze's *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* in *Screen* vol 32 no 2 (1991) pp 238–43

The modernity of Deren's life and work, her involvement with some of the most significant cultural and political events of her time, are among the most interesting things brought to light, mainly through interviews and personal memorabilia, by *The Legend of Maya Deren*. She was born in Kiev in the year of the revolution to Jewish parents who fled the USSR in 1922 because of pogroms in the Ukraine, and her psychiatrist father was an acquaintance of Trotsky. As a student, she became a socialist activist and translated Victor Serge's account of Leningrad in the first days of the revolution, *The Conquered City*. In the early 1940s, she hooked up with Katherine Dunham's Afro-American dance troupe, and through her job as Dunham's secretary encountered the writers Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown, as well as Talley Beatty and Rita Christiani, black dancers who would work on her films. In New York during World War II she became a wellknown figure amongst European artists-in-exile—mixing in circles that included Duchamp, Matta, Richter, Breton and Mondrian as well as American writers such as Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote, and witnessing at first hand the transplanting of European modernism to New York (the cast lists for her films include Anais Nin, John Cage and Gore Vidal). By the end of the 1940s her interest in cultures outside the Euro-American sphere led her to Haiti to research voodoo. Whilst in some respects Deren seems to have pursued at least three or four different lives, between them her interests map the terrain that has shaped the progressive thought and avant-garde art of this century: socialism, modernism, psychology and ethnography.

Perhaps the central connecting figure for these apparently disparate elements of Deren's life is displacement: a migrant by the

age of five, she was drawn to minority politics, minor art forms and people and cultures foreign to or marginalized by her adopted country. A recurring theme throughout *Legend* is her lack or denial of a Jewish identity, significant given the times she lived through, and surprising given that many of her closest friends were also Jewish. Hella Heyman, the camerawoman on *At Land* (1943) and *Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945–6), describes how Deren changed her name to ‘Hella Hamon’ on one of the credits to conceal Heyman’s Jewishness

Heyman was my maiden name, and it was a very jewish name. That was embarrassing for her . . . She actively *denied* being a jew. I mean, she just didn’t want to own up to it. She just wanted to be a citizen of the world, not identified with a group . . . You know, basically Maya was a nice, warm jewish girl. She really was. If she would only let herself be. But she spent so much energy denying that part of her, which was really the sterling part of her. (Chambers, p. 201)

An interview with Rita Christiani, the dancer with whom Deren doubles as a combined protagonist in *Ritual in Transfigured Time*, reveals Deren more positively as someone whose own thorough and often painful experience of not belonging was turned to advantage in a double displacement, whereby instead of seeking community through her own ethnic identity she pursued her otherness to what white America then defined as its political breaking point

This woman did the business of mixing with racial groups. I don’t know where she got the idea from. I don’t know where she got the gall, as they used to say then. I don’t remember feeling any different at their house. (Chambers, p. 519)

Three times displaced in American patriarchy, as a Russian, a Jew and a woman, Deren insistently centred displaced bodies and displaced centred ones in her films, creating a world on film in which black and female bodies trace the continuity of experience and white male ones often represent threat and instability. The idea of an aesthetic of instability recurs throughout her writings on film, but is usually related to current scientific concepts and technological advances – perhaps the effect of the authoritative tone and assumption of universality usual in the academic genre in which she was writing. In *An Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* she connects instability with the discovery and application of the scientific principle of relativity, and in other writings, such as the essay ‘Cinema as an art form’ (1946), with a phenomenological approach to consciousness and experience. Yet when she writes in the latter

The individual, deprived of the absolutisms which moulded the

moral patterns of his life, is faced with a critical, desperate need to discover in himself an integrity at once constant enough to constitute an identity, and adjustable enough to relate to an apparently anarchic universe . (*Chambers*, p 320),

she might just as well be discussing the effects on subjectivities – including her own – of the material and ideological changes that transformed relations between classes, sexes and races in her lifetime. In this context, most of Deren's films can be read not in terms of the atomized persona of Sitney's romantic tradition but through Trinh T. Minh-ha's notion of the enunciation of Inappropriate(d) Others. *Chambers* concludes in 1947, before Deren's departure to Haiti for the first time, leaving the story of her trajectory away from Euro-American culture to be continued; but it does give some insight into the continuity of her work in different fields and its derivation, to some degree, from a lack of identification with western patriarchal culture.

Chambers also concludes before the years of Cinema 16 and the experimental film movement, the period of Deren's life in which her activities would earn her the dubious distinction of the title Mother of the avant-garde film, and so it is not yet certain how that aspect of her 'legend' will be dealt with. In some feminist texts on Deren, though, this has already begun to appear as a major irritant. Thus Patricia Mellencamp in a recent essay:

Although Sitney has a chapter on Deren's work, 'Ritual and Nature', with the biological determinism as giveaway, his sniping at Deren is scholastically questionable. It is a tactic of curtailment of a competing 'legend' of subjectivity – set against the myth of Brakhage. The story of classicism versus romanticism, or women versus men, of Deren versus Brakhage, of mother against father/son, of female subjectivity, influence, and power, which begins in *Meshes of the Afternoon* and continues each time I screen it, ends in the first two chapters of *Visionary Film*. Sitney imagines that Deren's death in 1961 silences her opposition, allowing romanticism, a male purview, to emerge as the unquestioned victor – the Perseus model of avant garde with Medusa now dead.²

In short, it is only a little step from the primal scene in which Deren is honoured as Mother to the repudiation of femininity in which her films are backhandedly dismissed. This seems obvious to me; but, curiously, what has not been contested in most feminist writings on Deren is precisely this Oedipal motif. The project of constructing a prehistory for feminist cinema, which has rarely been seriously interrogated, has often accepted too readily the familial lineage model common to much patriarchal historicism. Reversing

2 Patricia Mellencamp, *Visionary Film and sexual difference in her Indiscretions: Avant-Garde Film, Video and Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1990) p. 32. This point is also argued in a chapter of my unpublished MA thesis 'Patriarchal poetry' pp. 14–22 of Alison Butler, *Maya Deren: the politics of self-representation* (University of East Anglia 1984).

3 Roland Barthes 'Novels and children', in *Mythologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972) p. 50

patrilinearity into matrilinearity, replacing Deren's personal film poet 'sons' with feminist filmmaker 'daughters', Stan Brakhage with Sally Potter, feminist criticism may yet have to come to terms with what it means to think of women artists of the past as our mothers. *The Legend of Maya Deren* not only retains the maternal metaphor but instates, in the preface to *Signatures* ('A woman seeing'), investigation of the mother and her production as one of the mainstays of the conceptual framework of the research project as a whole. Although 'Maya Deren created six films, two books, and no children' (*Signatures*, p. xi), Millicent Hodson's discussion of women's creativity nevertheless turns on the question of maternity – in Deren's case maternity resisted or denied (in defiance of the creed of women's magazines, represented here by a quotation from Barthes at his most arch: '... Women are on the earth to give children to men; let them write as much as they like, let them decorate their condition, but above all, let them not depart from it').³

This occurs amidst several pages of reflection on the image of Deren as a woman artist, prompted by the famous 'Botticelli' still taken from *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) and used ever after by Deren to publicize her work despite a reported lack of resemblance to her which increased with passing years. By the conclusion of this passage, the still begins to take on, besides its resonances of the Venus in Botticelli's *Primavera*, an aspect of the Madonna; so that although Hodson's intention is clearly to oppose the stereotyping of women's creativity as maternal, the weight of the symbolism she uses drags her argument off in an undertow of biological essentialism. Even were this not so, I suspect that the very nature of the project, a microscopically detailed study of the life, works and 'legend' of a historical female role model, could not but bring into play fantasies of the mother. This entails particular risks: daughters as well as sons repudiate the mother, however differently, and it is possible to detect in some of *Legend's* material an oscillation between idealization and denigration, for example in the overvaluation of some of the material (Deren's no more than competent poetry, for instance) and the inclusion of some fairly negative testimony which adds little to our understanding of Deren as an artist (for example the interview with Louis Zwerling, who bedded her in the late 1930s and remembers her chiefly as stocky, hairy and sexually aggressive).

The very structure of the book, determined by the various names Deren adopted or was given in the course of her life and the metaphorical or real spaces she inhabited (the name of the father and the mother's body?), traces the process by which Deren consciously created her identity as an artist. As one documentor comments

Somebody like Maya invents a legend about herself, absolutely *forces* her life into that legend. The legend is what remains, not the truth of that life. On that level, biography is fascinating. And dangerous (Miriam Arsham, interview, *Chambers*, p. 446)

Confronted with such a production, the artist as her own best work, the authors of *Legend* have only two options: demythification or remythification. They choose both. This makes the book a strange read at times, as uncomfortable as it is illuminating, a little drama played out on feminism's own Oedipal stage. From the references to age in *Signatures* it seems that the authors were all under thirty-five when the project was begun; by the time the last volume is published it is probable that they will be as old as, or older than, Deren was when she died. It will be interesting to see whether the later volumes reflect this – particularly in light of the most recent genre to have arrived in feminist film theory: menopausal carnivalesque.

review:

Yvonne Rainer, *The Films of Yvonne Rainer*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989, 225pp.

SANDRA KEMP

I was always a great fan of Rainer in her dancer/choreographer incarnation. Her *Trio A* (1967) was, after all, the *Finnegan's Wake* of dance. Along with Siobhan Davies and Pina Bausch (to name just a couple), Rainer's work in the 1970s brought modernist and avant-garde modes to dance.¹ But I would agree with B. Ruby Rich and Mitchell Rosenbaum, who in their prefatory pieces to this collection of Rainer's film scripts contend that it was the need to deal more intensively with *emotion* (here Rainer shares with other feminists the emphasis on emotion in art as of primary value) and with the problems of and possibilities of *narrative* that led Rainer away from dance and towards film.²

S says to J in Rainer's *Film About A Woman Who* "It is unthinkable that I live in this condition in intimacy with another person. And the possibility of living a life without intimate connections is equally intolerable. Is it any wonder that the most plausible solution is to remove my existence?" (p. 78). And Rainer's preoccupation with detachment and engagement in a work of art (and, in technical terms, with the handling of identification and distanciation) is part and parcel of her continuing concern with the private/public split (especially as this manifests itself for an artist). More recently, she has been particularly concerned with the tensions and contradictions between the individual psyche and the social/political being. In her own words

The personal and the political are not synonymous. They overlap

¹ See Sally Banes *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Postmodern Dance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980).

² Although ironically the generation of choreographers that emerged in the 1980s had an insatiable appetite for narratives of all kinds: autobiographies, biographies, fiction, political documents, interviews, etc. See Sally Banes "Happily ever after: the postmodern fairy tale and the new dance," unpublished article, 1989.

and intertwine. And one must struggle constantly to assess one's power, or lack of it, in every sphere of one's life. (pp. 22–3)

In Rainer's films, the public/private tension is manifest at the level of both content and form. As Lucy Lippard notes, Rainer has frequently used autobiographical fragments as props, and this has caused its own problems.³ More specifically, *Film About A Woman Who . . .* developed, in Rich's words, 'the mechanisms by which the materials of autobiography could be successfully combined with those of fictional and documentary materials to form a personal text' (p. 10)⁴ On the question of form/genre, Rainer herself notes that.

Feminist theorists like Mulvey and Kaplan have pointed out that melodrama, even soap opera, is a place where women's dilemmas are played out in a very visible way. So this offers the avant-garde filmmaker a formal arena in which to make the tensions and dilemmas of women living in a patriarchy accessible and visible. . . . (p. 41)

Thus Rainer 'reinvented melodrama as a genre, accented for the contemporary psyche' (p. 7); and it is worth quoting Rich at some length on what this involved:

A provisional set of elements can be identified as intrinsic to the 'woman's film' melodramas, indeed so implicit as to require a feminist attention. Such a set includes: the presence of a woman at the centre of the film; a domestic setting, usually the site of domestic conflict; an ellipsis of time to allow for the development of emotion, always central to the drama; extreme verbalization, which replaces physical action as the means of communication for the now-interior movement; and finally, the woman's ultimate decision to release her emotions (p. 9)

The Films of Yvonne Rainer is a kind of *festschrift*, the purpose of the book is to acknowledge her status as, in Teresa de Lauretis's words, 'a distinguished exemplar of contemporary American art'. (p. vii) Together with carefully edited versions of five scripts (*Lives of Performers* [1972], *Film About A Woman Who . . .* [1974], *Kristina Talking Pictures* [1976], *Journeys From Berlin/1971* [1980], and *The Man Who Envied Women* [1985]), the book contains a comprehensive bibliography compiled by Patricia White, and an introductory essay by B. Ruby Rich which covers the films up to 1980. Two other pieces, a 1988 interview by Mitchell Rosenbaum and a polemical reading of *The Man Who Envied Women* by Bérénice Reynaud, cover Rainer's more recent works and current concerns.

The first half of the book is packed with information. A reader unacquainted with Rainer's work will find here all the necessary

3 Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), p. 71

4 This is in line with the current development of the genre of 'personal criticism' in the USA. See Nancy Miller, *Getting Personal* (New York: Routledge, 1991). 5 Lippard, *From the Center*, p. 267

background. Rainer's critique of dominant modes of cultural production and reproduction, her battles with illusion, theatricality, and the limitations of narrative codes; her play on expectations in an attempt to free her audiences from enthrallment to cinematic apparatus and from manipulation by fiction are lucidly charted as her recurrent themes and motifs. The dance background remains in the repeated delineation of human interaction and performance. 'Social interactions seem to be mostly about seduction' (*Film About A Woman Who . . .*) (p. 79) Again, 'Everything is about seduction or death.' (p. 82) Again, 'Emotional relationships are relationships of desire, tainted by coercion and constraint' (*Walk, She Said*) (p. 6) Rainer's concerns with woman's place in narrative structures, with the politics of representation (self-image, intimacy, sexuality), are always bound up with complex notions of power:

In each case, one's personal *actual* power is available, to however limited a degree, and must be confronted, or acknowledged, in some fashion . . . [She] takes responsibility for her own destructiveness. . . . She assumes responsibility for her own life. (p. 22)

The second half of the book contains, as I have said, the scripts. At this point, as I was reading, an unease and an uncertainty about who might read the collection kept surfacing. Film buffs? Students/academics? That amorphous baggy monster, The General Public? In her foreword, de Lauretis claims that the book will be of interest to anyone concerned with the visual arts, women's cinema, aesthetics and cultural criticism. Let us hope so. I am less sanguine about her statement that 'the scripts of the films are far more than a notation of the dialogues or the verbal support of the cinematic images, they are artistic and critical texts in their own right, as intensely and deliberately *written* as the essays of Virginia Woolf . . .' (p. vii)

One obvious advantage of reading the scripts rather than seeing the films is that you can control the pace at which you read, can pause at leisure for reflection. But modern technology in the shape of the remote control can produce the same freeze frame effect. Moreover, to read the scripts is to turn them into narratives: to prioritize the verbal qualities at the expense of the visual effects. More importantly, it is to make an artificial and misleading division or separation between the two. As Bérénice Reynaud comments on *Journeys from Berlin/1971*: 'the vividness and excitement of the soundtrack contrasts with the formal, quiet, discreet and faintly elegiac aspect of the image'. (p. 30) And Rainer herself explains 'at the visual level nothing is consummated. And, at the level of discourse, it is entirely about consummation' (p. 30) In her *From The Center*, Lucy Lippard, commenting on the same effect, notes that 'Rainer uses words and images as though they were the same medium, as though you could start a sequence verbally and finish it

visually' ⁵ Elsewhere, Rainer explains the 'value' of playing with the optical materiality of film – 'unless you go into video, and then you get a whole other kind of imagery that's possible with electronics'.

The question here is whether the script *read* can in any way be the same as the script *shot*? And this is, in turn, to raise other questions. Is the film script a version of the film (one among many scripts)? Or is the film a version of the script (one among many films)? What difference does it make to see a film after reading the script? And in what order should we proceed? Should we read the script after seeing the film? Or, if we read the script do we not then need to see the film? Or is it best, as usually happens, to see the film and never read the script?

It is equally possible to turn the questions the other way round. One could argue (like de Lauretis) that Rainer's scripts focus our attention on what Barthes called the *scriptible* (the reader as writer, or the writerly text), and this kind of reading precisely emphasizes/demonstrates Rainer's techniques of accretion, ambiguity, fragmentation and collage in process. Above all, it highlights her refusal of a 'coherent' or 'linear' plot/narrative. Despite her disclaimers ('... Martha Graham, Godard and Virginia Woolf, I can't say any of them were prime movers for me . . .' [p 38]), Rainer's style is highly modernist. As she says in voice over in *Film About A Woman Who . . .*, what is crucial is to have an 'acute sense of the moment' (p. 89): 'But I don't necessarily know the end effect. That is one by-product of collage. Ambiguity is something that is my stock in trade . . .' (p. 39)

Rainer's films are as resistant to metaphorical and symbolic modes, and to interpretation, as all classic modernist texts 'This Foucault stuff? . . . Is it being used for bullshit purposes, or what?', she imagines people asking in *The Man Who Envied Women* (and in the same film Trisha completes Jackie's quote from Meaghan Morris 'If a girl takes her eyes off Lacan and Derrida long enough to look, she may discover she is the invisible man' [pp 214–15]) From a purely academic perspective, however, one advantage of reading the scripts in sequence (rather than watching the films one at a time on separate occasions) is that one gets a clear idea of recurrent motifs

First, and most important, there emerges the tension between the aesthetic distance described above and the intensity of soap opera. Perhaps this is what Shirley means in *Film About A Woman Who . . .* when she says 'only in the movies can you send your mind away' (p. 86)

Second – and despite her disclaimers about feminism – Rainer's filmic work clearly comes out of a strong women's movement, and her material is clearly linked to feminist 'culture'. Rainer herself claims to be 'haranguing' her audiences for political purposes, but in my view the films are more subtle than that. Above all, what is

striking about Rainer's work is her refusal to let her audiences adjust meaning to gender, and her awareness of the narrative implications of this, particularly in terms of the limitations of narrative codes. Rainer's films are often classified as 'affliction' films (films that centre on the suffering of female characters), but again I see them as more actively positive than this, and as resistant to a victimist historiography. Rainer's emphasis is always on the individual's own power and responsibility. She is constantly seeking a more rigorous documentation of the political. As Shirley says in *Film About A Woman Who* . . .

Not that it's a matter of victims and oppressors. She simply can't find alternatives to being inside with her fear or standing in the rain with her self-contempt. . . (p. 7)

review:

Mary Ellen Brown (ed.), *Television and Women's Culture* (Communication and Human Values Series). London: Sage, 1990, 244pp.

Christine Geraghty, *Women and Soap Opera*. London: Polity Press, 1991, 211pp.

PATRICIA HOLLAND

'There *is* a problem here . . .', insists Michèle Mattelart, writing on soap opera. And the problem is that of women's pleasure. She is disturbed by 'the fact that these stories still provide *pleasure* for women viewers who are critically aware of how alienating they are and who have located the mechanisms through which their work is carried on'.¹ Mary Ellen Brown, in her conclusion to her edited collection *Television and Women's Culture*, finds such a formulation itself a problem. She points out that it displaces anxiety around the nexus woman/pleasure from the representation of women in the text to the audience of actual women. 'When women derive pleasure from popular narrative forms, the process is viewed as a problem'. (p. 201) Women, and especially feminist critics, find themselves trapped in sets of endless Chinese boxes where the solution to one problem can only pose the next. Such are the dilemmas facing the authors of these two books.

Of course, 'women's' pleasure – just like 'women's' genres and 'women's' culture – remains an elusive concept. A 'women's' culture can only make sense over and against a 'men's' culture – and men's culture, by its own preference, does not exist. It strives to efface itself into the human norm and aims to occupy the space of universal invisibility, of culture for all, before differentiation. Differentiation, of itself, comes to imply a reduction in status, a

¹ Michèle Mattelart, *Women, Media and Crisis: Femininity and Disorder* (London: Comedia 1986), p. 15

decline from the highest ideals and standards. Thus questions of women's culture are inextricably bound up with questions of value. Here is the most troublesome of problems faced by a valorization of women's pleasures. When seen as specific to women, they are, by definition, subordinate; when their specificity is lost, women, too, are somehow mislaid. In *Women and Soap Opera*, Christine Geraghty notes that since soap became critically revalued – *Brookside*, launched in 1982, and *EastEnders* (1985–) claimed a social and aesthetic seriousness absent from *Coronation Street* (1960–) and *Crossroads* (1965–88) – the genre itself, in both content and address, has tended to be 'defeminized'.

The strategy adopted by the contributors to *Television and Women's Culture* for dealing with questions of value and legitimation is the now familiar shift from text to a negotiation between text and audience, finding cultural value in the creative activity of the viewer. Caren J. Deming, for example, suggests that 'auditing' rather than 'viewing' describes that activity more accurately. Auditors 'are actively involved in listening (sound dominates picture in television), examining, checking and adjusting content to suit their experiences of the world' (p. 49). But although a new word is useful, the arbitrary claim that sound dominates vision detracts from this one. Deming goes on to argue that television itself parallels the feminine – it is incomplete, heteronomous and undervalued. Lessons from feminism can assist a 'television centred television criticism'. Critics should remain close to the programmes themselves, should reject unifying theories that attempt to judge all television by a single standard, and remain 'open to the possibility that televisual texts may manifest opposition under a glossy surface of consumerist or patriarchal values'. (p. 59)

In the spirit of that argument this book is about the routine, the mundane and the trivial in television output – game shows, music videos and especially soap opera. The contributors celebrate those aspects of women's culture that are normally undervalued. They are unwilling to begrudge or pass judgement on women's enjoyment even where – or, perversely, *especially* where – it does not fit preconceived ideas of the ideologically correct. And yet, the book's overriding theme is the *political* rescue of those exciting, if ambivalent, aims by identifying 'resistance' and the possibility of opposition in every aspect of women's use of television. It describes 'auditing' activities which, in the last resort, represent a refusal to accept a value system which continuously places women in a position of subordination. Thus Lisa A. Lewis describes American middle-class girls' imaginative use of consumer culture and Madonna and Cyndi Lauper videos; Ien Ang discusses the validation of emotion through identification with the melodramatic character of Sue Ellen in *Dallas*, while Dorothy Hobson, in her discussions with a group of saleswomen, intriguingly demonstrates how their daily flow of

conversation at work becomes a cultural activity which meshes their television viewing with their wider interests and their personal lives

For Mary Ellen Brown, these encounters between text and audience constitute a 'feminine discourse' which 'holds the prospect of empowerment for its feminine subjects'. It 'acknowledges women's position of subordination within patriarchal society' but, by playing with the conventions of the dominant discourse, it 'constitutes itself as "other" to it and displays a potential resistance'. (pp 204–5) There seems to be general agreement that such 'feminine discourse' operates most effectively in relation to soap opera. Soap is the quintessential television form, with its interweaving themes, performed in short (and ever shortening) segments, its personalization of issues, its low-key demands on audience attention no less than its association with women. It has the 'mundanity and openness' that Caren Deming argues is necessary to television. Like television itself, any particular episode may be watched in many different ways, ranging from the casual to the dedicated. Each episode must have something to offer those who are idly flicking through the channels waiting for something to catch their attention, as well as to the seasoned 'auditor' who has followed a programme for many years. The first brings the expertise of the medium itself, the second brings a specific set of memories and empathies that can appear to transcend the medium as they settle into memory, rather like a family history

The great strength of Christine Geraghty's book, *Women and Soap Opera*, is that it draws on both sorts of knowledge. As one of the pioneers of the study and appreciation of soap opera, Geraghty writes from a long-term engagement both with the form and with the individual programmes she discusses. *Women and Soap Opera* looks at women as protagonists and as audience, and at the same time studies the instability of the genre itself and its openness to other generic elements – light entertainment in its spectacular values, melodrama in its emotions and domestic focus, and the occasional excursions into crime or detective genres. The author's brief does not allow her to examine the even more influential encroachment of soap-opera forms into the surrounding television flow, as the ever fragile line between fact and fiction is put under even greater pressure by the continuous update and multiple plots characteristic of soap. In September 1991, Thursday evenings on ITV displayed the trend. 7.00pm *Emmerdale*, pure soap; 7.30pm *Jimmy's*, hospital documentary soap; 8.00pm *The Bill*, soap-like police series. Only at 8.30 do we hit 'quality television' with *This Week* squatting in a slot that is still protected by the regulatory authorities.

Christine Geraghty draws the contrast between the camp hysteria of US prime-time soaps – *Dynasty* and *Dallas* – and the realist aspirations of the British *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders*, *Crossroads*

and *Brookside*. Most striking is the difference between the family-centred but heavily patriarchal narratives of inheritance, disputed paternity, and marriages motivated by finance which characterize the wealthy family businesses of the US soaps, and the nostalgic themes of community and locality of the British variety – especially *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders*. There, paradoxically, the public spaces of market, cafe, launderette and even the pub are as important as the domestic space of the home, partly because they are used by networks of women which cut across family units. Geraghty points to the ‘mothering structure’ in the narratives of British soaps, where the tough but caring matriarch safeguards community values and ensures that women dominate the narrative.

Alongside this validation of the women characters, Geraghty follows Richard Dyer in arguing that the much criticized ‘escapism’ of women’s fiction should be seen as offering ‘utopian possibilities’. ‘the experience of a different world, one which is escapist precisely because it is based on the inadequacies experienced in day-to-day life’. (p. 118) She applies Richard Dyer’s five ‘utopian solutions’ – energy, abundance, intensity, transparency, community – both to the ‘realist’ British soaps and to the ‘excessive’ US ones, and argues that such fictions make it possible to imagine the world as other than it is. I find this identification of areas where glimpses of possible changes are experienced, rather than spelled out, more convincing than the appeal to the ‘carnavalesque’ which runs through *Television and Women’s Culture*. Mary Ellen Brown finds the ‘totally subversive values of the carnival’ in soaps like *Dallas* and *Dynasty* which ‘turn the world inside out’. And writing of the Australian *New Price is Right*, John Fiske describes a ‘carnavalesque’ liberation of the skills of consumption – the daily visits to the supermarket – ‘that removes them from the sphere of subjugated, silenced domestic labour’ (p. 137) Such moments of carnival contain ‘subversive elements which expose the social norms for what they are arbitrary and therefore ultimately changeable’. (p. 137) It seems to me doubtful that the world is indeed turned inside out, rather than simply speeded up and made more extreme, by programmes in which values, divisions and hierarchies are in no way reversed.

This brings us back to the increasingly dubious area of women’s ‘resistance’. For the tactics of celebrating what *is* rather than posing alternatives, of ‘making do’ (John Fiske’s phrase again [p. 141]), can come close to an approach which holds women in their place, exercising a resistance which can never ‘win’. Seen in this way, ‘resistance’ comes to sound dangerously close to accommodation to dominant values. For domination is *created* by resistance. It needs resistance in order to demonstrate its superiority and greater strength. Women’s resistance can be the very mechanism of women’s subordination. The desire to hang on to pleasure, to define it as subversive rather than as a problem,

2 John Caughie 'Adorno's
reproach: repetition, difference
and television genre' *Screen*
vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 127-53

manifests itself throughout *Television and Women's Culture*. In consequence the writers seem to be claiming that pleasure *in itself* constitutes political opposition. Together with the celebration of pluralism and the trivial and the concentration on 'auditing' activities – as John Caughie points out² – this sidesteps rather than tackles head on the crucial concurrence of gender, genre and value. Although Mary Ellen Brown's concept of 'genres of discourse' – where women's genres are not to be found in specific types of programme, but in the ways programmes are used – goes some way to dealing with that problem, the approach refuses to engage with those points where television places its highest claim to seriousness, objectivity and public worth – news and current affairs. This is an all too common absence in feminist writings on television, overlooking the fact that the 'trivial' and the 'important' are themselves always juxtaposed in the television flow.

Like soap opera, television flattens its moments of drama and high emotion. Its loose and productive narratives are suited, it is said, to women's ways of viewing and allow for a non-repressive female audience position. The creative viewer, caught up in no single narrative identification, may live through a choice of different subjectivities. But this 'mothering structure' of viewing, like the matriarch in the soap opera, is expected to be all tolerant. Little is put at risk, because any outcome is only temporary. On television there is always something next. Even death is not final because there are always more characters to carry on the story, more episodes, more programmes to come. But surely women should not be satisfied to be told that this tolerant accommodation is their only way to experience fiction, that forms of opposition that put more at risk are not for them. Women also need narratives on a grander scale. A pleasurable accommodation to the daily grind is not enough. Women's pleasure, if conceptualized only in this way, indeed remains a problem.